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HARRY HERDER, JR.

THE LIBERATION OF BRIGHENWARD

Delivered 10/3/2000

Catharsis, n. 1. Purgation. 2. Aesthetics. Purification or purgation of the emotion by art; - a term used by Aristotle in describing the effect of tragedy as "through pity and fear effecting a catharsis of these emotions." 3. Psychoanalysis. Elimination of a complex by bringing it to consciousness and affoding it expression.

Webster's Collegiate

Fifth Edition Dictionary

INTRODUCTION

What I am attempting to do here strikes at all three of the definitions listed previously. Almost exactly forty-six years ago this moment, I went through a set of experiences that I have never been able to shake from my mind. They subside in my mind, and, then, in the spring always, some small trigger will set them off and I will be immersed in these experiences once more. The degree of immersion varies from year to year, but there is no gradual diminution with time. I note, but do not understand, that the events occurred in the spring, and the re-immersion seems to be always in the spring. This year I set those memories on paper, all of them, or at least all of them I recall. I hope for the catharsis. I do not expect a complete purging - that would be expecting too much, but if I can get these memories to crawl deeper into my mind, to reappear less vividly, and less frequently, it will be a help.

I do no research here. I am sitting and typing and telling the story. This story really happened to me and to a bunch of other people. The story is my memory at work. If there are others who remember the story differently, it would not surprise me. It has been a long time, and all of us will have changed. I contend that two people standing side by side, witnessing some violent action, would describe that action differently ten minutes later. All of our observations are tempered by whatever experience we bring to the event, and then they are modified by time, and, in this case, by considerable time. If I am in disagreement with others in my group who witnessed these same events that I witnessed, I make no apology for that for that disagreement, nor do I expect an apology, or an explanation from them. We are as we are, we saw what we saw,

and we remember as we remember. So be it. These are my memories. I am making no polls, I am surveying no feelings. It is enough for me that I feel what I do feel, and I am now attempting to thin those feelings out.

And I use the reader. I must purge these feelings on some one, and if I have readers, it is they I am using. I apologize to them, and I ask for their understanding.

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This all happened to a group of us in March or April (I have no idea which - it could be researched out with no great problem) of 1945. There are some facts in the story it took us a few months longer to discover, but they will have to wait for a moment. The things we found then were grotesque enough without knowing some of the other things we did learn later. As a P. F. C. in the U. S. Army, there was no way that I could learn the origin of the orders that started it all. In fact when we started there was no way for those of us at the bottom of the ladder to have any idea at all where we were going or what we were up to. Our outfit did hook up with a tank destroyer outfit (I have no idea which), and we did blow across the landscape of Eastern Germany with little opposition. I do remember riding on the top of one of those vehicles that I, mistakenly, thought of as a tank. We were in columns and we were not horsing around. There were only our company and the group of tankers, and we were in a hurry.

What I do remember is that we eventually drove up some gentle valley where there were trees on either side of us, when we made a sharp left turn, so sharp that those of us on the top of the vehicles were grabbing things to keep from falling off. By the time we had regained our balance, there it was: a great high barbed wire fence at least ten feet high, maybe more. Between us and the fence and running parallel to the fence was a dirt road, and beyond the fence were two more layers of barbed wire fence not quite as tall. There seemed to be about five yards, maybe a little more, between those fences. (I expect they had been measured out in the metric system.) The barbed wire in those fences was laced in a fine mesh, so finely meshed no one was going to get through it. Our tanks slowed down, but they did not stop; they blew straight at and through the barbed wire. Those of us riding the top scurried quickly to get behind the turret, while those vehicles just continued to charge. When we broke through the first of those fences we got a clue, the first clue as to what we had come upon, but we had no real comprehension at all of what was to assault our senses for the next hours, the next days.

We hit those fences with enough speed so that it was unclear to me whether it was the first level, or the second, or the third, but at least one of those levels was hot with electricity. We hit the fences, blew through them, and shorted out whichever it was on the

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damp ground. Once we were through the fences we turned left a bit and took off up a gentle cleared hill toward a concentration of buildings. Those buildings were still two hundred yards or more up the hill from us, but it didn't take long for those tanks to growl their way up toward those buildings. I recall that I was very much on the alert. The tanker on our vehicle assigned to the machine gun was on that weapon and ready to use it, and those of us riding the top were ready to bail off and hit the ground on the run and do whatever it was that we were going to have to do. I was an assistant bazooka man, and I had a sack with ten bazooka rounds hung over my shoulder; I had an M1 Garand, and some bandoliers of ammo for that; some grenades hanging one place and another; a fully loaded cartridge belt; and I was on my toes ready to scramble off that tank at the first sign of trouble. I would follow the bazooka man: wherever he went I would go. It turned out that we didn't need any of that hardware.

I remember scouting out the area in front of us quickly with my eyes. There were no great details, but I saw that over to the left, next to, and just inside of the fence, and to our front, were some major buildings, and next to one of those buildings was a monster of a chimney, a monster both in diameter and in height. It might have appeared huge because the buildings next to it were only two or three stories high, but it was an extraordinary chimney, still seeming so much later, when things had cooled down considerably. Now, black smoke was pouring out of it, and blowing away from us, but we could still smell it. An ugly horrible smell. A vicious smell.

The tank which we were riding, along with two other tanks in our column, wheeled to the left so that the three of them made a front. Two more columns containing the rest of our company, off to our right, made the same maneuver so that all of us presented one front. Our Company Commander, together with the commander of the tank destroyer outfit, was riding in a jeep somewhere near the middle of all of that mess. Once we presented that front, those of us who were on top of the tanks jumped off and spread out on the same front. I was prepared to flatten out on the deck, but it turned out we didn't have to, and none of us did. I stayed close to Stover, my bazooka man, ready to do whatever it was he was going to do. None of us - well, none of us in the lower ranks knew what it was we were up to or where we were, but we were fully expecting a fire fight with German troops, whose camp we had just stormed and taken, and we, or at least I, thought they would be angry at us. It turned out there were no German troops present. Slowly, as we formed up, a ragged group of human beings started to creep out of, and from between the buildings in front of us.

As we watched these men, the number and the different types of buildings came to my attention. From them came these human beings, timidly, slowly, deliberately showing their hands, all in a sort of

uniform, or bits and pieces of a uniform, made from horribly coarse cloth, striped, the stripes running vertically. The stripes alternating a dull dark grey with a darkish blue that were a half an inch, maybe a little more, wide. Some of those human beings wore pants made of the material, some had shirt/jackets, and some had hats. Some of them only had one piece of the uniform, others had two, many had all three parts. They came out of the buildings and just stood there, making me feel foolish with all of that firepower hanging on me. I certainly wouldn't be needing it with these folks.

The jeeps, our company commander's and a few others, rolled forward very slowly toward these people, and , as they parted, drove slowly through them, to the brick building next to that tall chimney, and our officers disappeared inside. Our platoon sergeant had us form up some and relax, then signaled that horde of human beings to stand fast; he just held both hands up, palms out, and motioned them backwards slowly. Everything was very quiet. The tanks were all in slow idle. Hesitatingly we inched closer to that strange group as they also started inching closer to us. Some of them spoke English, and asked, "Are you American?" We said we were, and the reaction of the whole mass was immediate: simultaneously on their faces were relaxation, ease, joy, and they all began chattering to us in a babble of tongues that we couldn't answer - but we could, and did, point the muzzles of our weapons at the ground, making it obvious these weapons were not "at the ready".

It was then that the smell of the place started to get to me. (What one has trouble remembering during these antiseptic times is that under the best of conditions we could only rarely take a shower, and our uniforms were never fresh or clean. We had been blowing around Germany from one place to another for some time and we were all a little raunchy in the odor department.) Speaking only for myself, and giving myself the best of it, I would have to admit that I was probably more than just a little gamey and would not have noticed the other guys in the company because they were in about the same state as I. Our noses, rebelling against the surroundings they were constantly subjected to , were not functioning anywhere near normally. But now there was a new odor, thick and hanging, and it assaulted the senses.

There was still space between us and the group in front of us, the people on both sides now relaxed, one side considerably more jubilant than the other, but all of the tensions were gone. We were inching closer together, when our platoon sergeant was called back to one of the tanks and got on the radio. He wasn't there but a few minutes, came back, formed up our platoon, and took us back away, toward the place where we had entered the camp, back toward the fences through which we had ripped holes. At each hole in the fence he left two of us. By the time he got to Bill Justis and me we were a long way from where we had started, a long way from the tanks and that bunch of people. We, Bill and I , were just about as far away

from that gang as you could get. The sergeant left us there with instructions that we were to let no one through that hole from either direction. He left Bill and me in the middle of the hole in the fence, and told us to hold that hole. The job was made simple, because there was no one who wanted the hole. The two of us were left standing there, feeling kind of silly about it all. We were intolerably curious about what it was we had come upon. We were several hundred yards from anybody who had any chance of answering our questions, and no one was about to come down to enlighten us. Now, Bill and I were very young; we were vigorous young things with an immense curiosity, and it was difficult standing still in the middle of a hole through a set of three fences. We started nosing around our area. Through the hole in the fences and across the dirt road from where we were, was a tower of a building about four stories high, the top story open all of the way around and covered by a peaked roof. There was a big searchlight mounted on the roof at the peak. The three stories under the open fourth story all had windows which looked out the front only, looking out at the fence. The entrance door was on the road facing the fence at the bottom level. At the bottom, the tower appeared to be about twenty feet by twenty feet, maybe a little less, the wall sloping in slightly so the top story, the open story, was maybe about fifteen feet square.

Bill and I drifted out through the fence and crossed the road to the tower and studied it. The tower was faced with a dirty grey stucco; the trim was wood, painted white and badly in need of a new coat. We were feeling just slightly guilty because Sergeant Blowers had told us to stay at the fence and guard that hole. I guess that we were guarding that hole in a fashion, but guarding it from the far side of the hole. In any event, there was no one near enough to take the hole from us. We were talking softly to each other, but neither of us knew a thing. We might have sounded as though we did, but we were only speculating at best. We hadn't the vaguest idea what we had run into. Not yet.

During our ruminations, we saw a jeep pull away from the group at the top of the hill and start down to the fence. As we watched it stopped at every hole, the driver talked to the people stationed at the hole, and those people at the hole would cross the road and enter one of the towers nearest them. Bill and I crossed back to the correct side of the fence and waited our turn. In a little while Sergeant Blowers came by, told us that all of the people inside of the camp had been told to stay inside of the fence, and that we were down by the holes to make sure they stayed inside. Bill and I were told to go into the tower, go to the top floor, to stay there, and to keep people from coming out through the hole. Those were the orders. We were about to satisfy a small part of our curiosity. We took off across the road, entered the door, and started surveying the situation. On the far wall of the bottom floor were stairs going up to the next level, built out of heavy "two by" lumber, pine. The stairs had a hand rail built from the

same wood. There were cupboards and chests around the walls; the middle of the bottom floor was open.

We climbed the steps, and on the second floor there was a table built into the middle of the room with seats around it and it was made of the same heavy pine; there were counters around the three walls, obviously it was some kind of a mess situation. The stairs continued up the back wall. The next floor contained three double bunks made of the same materials, nothing fancy. There were mattresses, blankets, and pillows on the bunks, and a space open in the middle with a table and two chairs. The steps continued up the back wall, and at the top there was a trap door covering them. We pushed it open and came out on the top floor which was open on all four sides. We secured the door open and looked around. The view was outstanding. The eave of the roof extended far out over the opening. At the front, on the camp side was a massive table made of the same kind of wood used throughout the building, and standing at the same height as the opening. We guessed from the hardware rigged into the middle of the table that it had been built to accommodate a machine gun, its site commanding a complete view of the fence in front of the tower. Bill and I were both tall so we had to duck slightly under the controls for the searchlight as we moved across the floor. (We both ducked instinctively from years of experience at bumping our heads and didn't even notice those controls right away. We noticed them later and tried to make the light work, but there was no electricity.) We each stood at opposite sides of the table and just looked out over the camp.

That part of the fence immediately in front of the tower had nearly a ninety degree bend. Our tower, at the bottom of the hill, was the lowest in elevation of all of the towers. The road in front of us took off up hill in either direction. There seemed to be about fifty yards, a little more, between the towers, and they all seemed to be spaced regularly. Looking to our left, back the way we had come down, we noticed the next three towers were empty, but there were two people in the fourth tower. Looking in the other direction, we saw no one in any of the towers and no holes in the fence. We had no way of communicating with the others from our platoon except by waving and using arm signals. It would have been futile to attempt to yell anything over those distances. Bill and I still didn't know where we were.

From the low point of the camp in front of us, the ground was all open and uphill. There were no trees inside of the fence, the grounds did not appear mowed, but they were not overgrown either; of course, it was spring, and things had no time to grow. If anybody were to approach the hole in the fence in front of us, we would be able to see them from a long way off, but there was no one at all moving in our direction this side of the buildings. The grounds in front of us inside the camp were empty and quiet. On the top of the hill near the buildings and amongst the buildings we

could see most of the vehicles we had recently been riding. After a short time, these vehicles began to move, they moved away from us, and it wasn't long before our only view was of the buildings with the huge chimney belching the black smoke.

I remember looking toward the back, away from the camp, where the land continued downwards, with a small valley breaking off gently to the right. The valley was open, but there were trees on both sides. It was the valley we had driven up to get to this place. In any direction away from the camp there were no buildings to be seen.

When we looked along the fence to our left, by the dirt road, in the direction Sergeant Blowers had brought us, we saw that the towers continued, many of them; then both the towers and the road took a bend to the right, extending farther up the hill becoming lost to sight because of the buildings. The tops of the towers could be seen over the buildings, but even they ceased to exist about the time they neared the huge chimney. There was a gap in the towers, and then they continued again over the tops of the buildings to the right on the crest of the hill, with many trees visible in their background. The towers continued to the right along a ridge for quite a ways, and then turned and came downhill to us.

There was a variety of buildings in that cluster on the top of the hill: permanent buildings of brick and stucco, and more temporary looking wooden buildings. Some of the wooden buildings were very barn-like, tall and plain, with only a few windows. Most of the permanent buildings were near the chimney, which was the focal point from our view.

Bill and I tried to size up the situation as we talked softly to each other, slowly stripping off our webbing gear and ammunition which we dumped on the table that had been built for the machine gun. Our rifles were leaning against the ledge in the corners. Last of all we took off our helmets and set them on the table. We lit cigarettes, leaned on the table, looked about us, and talked. Neither of us knew what it was we were encountering. We were both to young to have, in any meaningful way, understanding of the things that had been going on in Germany. Our first thought was that we were at a prisoner of war camp, and all of the people in the strange uniforms were the troops who had been captured by the German Army. That made a little sense to us, but the questions remained: Where were the German guards? Why the strange uniforms? Why were we keeping them in there? We only had each other's opinions, and there weren't any brilliant answers coming from that source.

The job we had been given was simple: keep those people inside of the fence. The job was made even more simple because no one appeared to

want to come through the hole. Not a soul came down the hill. The closest human beings to us were the guys in the other towers, and we couldn't even yell at them. Obviously, there was plenty of activity amongst the buildings at the top of the hill, but what that activity meant we had no inkling. Bill and I were left to our own musings.

We each pulled a blue box of K Rations from our jacket pockets, set them on the table, and had our lunch; our talk ranged further afield. We relived the last few days which we hadn't had time to talk of before. We speculated about the next few days which neither of us could possibly know anything about. We tried to make intelligent guesses on where we were in Germany, but neither of us was particularly good with German geography.

We passed our time eating our lunch and doing a job that didn't need to be done. It was serene and quiet - something we really hadn't experienced much of for months. Things had not been quiet at all since Bill, Tim, and I, along with three other guys had joined this company as replacements. Thousands of us had come to Europe on the "Queen Mary" and landed in Greenock, Scotland, and then ridden a train on to Southhampton, England where we spent two days in a camp beside the docks. (Where we sneaked out through a hole in the fence to go to pub across the street - our first truly foreign experience - there are many good stories from that pub.) We had stayed in Southhampton just long enough to get on another smaller boat to cross the English Channel to Le Havre, where we loaded everything we owned on our backs and marched through the town and up a hill to a camp which was also a cemetery and an ammunition depot. We spent the night in that camp, and then loaded up again, and marched back down the hill to a train depot. We loaded up on trains that I, in my imagination, thought must be the duplicates of those which the old guys at home described when they talked about World War I, the old "Forty and Eights". The ones we rode might have been different, but you couldn't prove it by me.

The train from Le Havre moved by fits and starts, never very fast, never stopping for very long. We were not crowded into the cars; there was room for us to flop around and get somewhat comfortable. I remember going through some French village; one of the townspeople ran beside the train at a trot, offering a bottle of wine for sale. One of our guys, sitting in the doorway of the car, gave him a dollar bill, one that we weren't supposed to have anymore, the kind the French people coveted. (We didn't know that yet.) Our friend in the doorway was proud that he had gotten a bottle of French wine for a dollar. He pried the cork out with a knife blade, tilted it and stopped. - the bottle had been filled with the urine of some animal. So much for French people. There are those amongst us who thought we ought to let the Germans have those people back, that the action would be just punishment for the Germans. The train continued moving on, the man with the dollar

bill dropping way back out of sight, possibly to sell another bottle of urine. Who knew?

The train eventually stopped in a rural area a long time later. We all crawled off, loaded onto trucks, and were taken to what had obviously been an older French military building of one sort or another. The word "fort" entered my mind as we unloaded from the trucks. A bunch of us were assigned to a big room on the second floor. We each grabbed one of the empty bunks, unloaded our gear, flopped down on the bed, and stretched out. Later, slowly, one at a time, we arose and started wandering around. In our explorations, we found some other people who had been in this place for a day or two already, and, from these "old timers", we discovered that we were in a "repple-depple", a replacement depot from which we would be assigned to permanent outfits. This we found out, along with other interesting tidbits of information, from hanging around the big lobby on the first floor, and on the wide steps leading up to the double front door. It took an hour, maybe a bit more, for those of us who had just arrived to become "old timers", trading bits and pieces of information. We, individually, would learn some little thing, immediately take the opportunity to let some one else know, and then we would be accepted as one of the experienced ones. I will not speculate on how much wrong information was assimilated by our group in this manner. For instance: We found out we were near Nancy. No, that wasn't true. We were near Metz. None of us knew the proximity of those two places, so that it was possible for us to be near them both. None of us knew what part of France Nancy and Metz were in. There were no maps available.

On a big bulletin board on the first floor between the two staircases leading to the upper floors, there were pages of paper stapled, all of them containing information about the assignments of the people who had preceded us. We found out that we could expect to be in this place about three days before being assigned to some outfit for permanent duty. There were a few in our midst who were returning to their permanent outfits from hospitals and were regarded by us with awe. Those organizations presently doing the fighting against the Germans would send requests to the replacement depot; the people permanently assigned to the depot would make up lists of names of those assigned; then the requesting organization would send trucks to pick up the people assigned to them. Once the truck you were aboard reached the outfit to which you had been assigned, you would stay on the truck, the driver would be told which regiment to take you to and where it was, the regimental headquarters would assign you to a battalion, and there you would unload from the truck and carry all of your gear to a company, then to a platoon, and, finally, to a squad; then you could drop your gear and get off your feet for a moment. Once more you were the new kid on the block. All of these things we learned from hanging around the first floor and adding to it what we knew of the Army from our own personal experience.

I did not know Bill back then, or Tim, or any of the others, but we were all in the replacement depot together. Because of my age - I had originally been assigned to anti-aircraft training because I wore glasses, and people who wore glasses were not thought fit for the infantry at the time - I had to recycle back to get infantry training once the people running the show decided it was all right for us "blinkies" to be in the infantry. All of this made me older and, before we left the United States, I was made an "Acting" Corporal for the voyage across the ocean. From that you may be able to get some idea of the nature of the people who were being sent to Europe during these times: Almost all of the people in our group, after having entered the Army, had gone through basic training, received a few more weeks of infantry training, and then been sent to Europe. (Groups with the same background were being sent to the Pacific.) Almost all of these good people were eighteen years old, a great many of them not even eighteen and a half. I had already been in the Army longer than a year. I was an "Acting" Corporal. I was allowed, even encouraged, in fact, ordered, to wear a black band around my sleeve with corporal stripes on it.

I had made a buddy, back at Fort Meade, and he, also, was made an "Acting" Corporal. They made him an Acting Corporal because he had missed a couple of shipments out of Fort Meade, and was, therefore, more experienced than the rest of the people in our draft. That was also my case: I had an extra week at Fort Meade because I needed a new pair of boots, and boots my size were just not readily available. I spent most of that week waiting for those boots working on KP. (There is a funny kind of story hidden away in that week if I ever get around to it.) When my boots finally came in, I was assigned to a draft, a group of people designated for a boat ride to Europe, and simultaneously made into an Acting Corporal. Shorty, my fellow "non-com", problem was also solved, and we were placed into a draft together. (I think that he needed a second pair of glasses or some such, and they wouldn't turn him loose until he had an extra pair with him.) We were an odd team: "Shorty" was just that - short, and I am not short, oh dear me, no. Shorty and I were copacetic right from the beginning. Shorty Herbst was very "good people" any way that people are measured. The two of us must have been together for only about two weeks, but they were most unusual weeks. There was nothing boring about them. The job of being an Acting Corporal amounted to little or nothing: We had to call roll and account for about a dozen people anytime that we transferred from one place to another, which we were doing frequently. We had the magnificent job of assigning our troops bunks on the Queen Mary, and other such important things. We had to make sure that our people knew when meal times were amongst other trivia. (There were just two meals a day, but there were double the number of people on the boat so the kitchen was coming up with four meals a day.)

All of us on the Queen Mary shared our bunk with one other person,

unknown, and got to use the bunk twelve hours of each day. This also meant that we had twelve hours to prowl around the Queen Mary which was kind of fun - there is a lot of room on that big rascal. The Queen Mary wasted no time at all crossing the Atlantic Ocean - it was something like five days after leaving New York City until we were docking in Greenock, Scotland.

Shorty Herbst and I grabbed adjacent bunks at the "Fort" near Nancy, and we stayed pretty much together, mingling on the first floor gathering all of the information one needed to be come an "old timer". We were still Acting Corporals and still wore our armbands. All of the orders that were printed with our names on them referred to us as Acting Corporals, but we had no duties any longer. The draft of which we were members came apart once we were in the hands of the people at the "repple-depple". We were now replacements the same as everyone else.

Some of the information that Shortie and I absorbed came from that great bulletin board on the first floor. We stood there together and studied it, and it slowly made sense to us. We knew that, in a day or two, our names would show up, and we would find out where we had been assigned, and then we would leave this place. There was every chance that we would be assigned together since we had arrived together and our names were alphabetically close, which was more important than several other factors, and we would be together in some outfit. The thought reassured the both of us in these upset times.

While we were studying the board, a lone paper, tucked way at the bottom in a corner, caught my eye, and I studied it. A small organization which wanted only volunteers was looking for a few volunteer replacements. Anyone volunteering was expected to pass a rigorous physical examination. I nudged Shorty and pointed to the notice and he read it. I told him I was going to try. He looked at me and laughed, and told me I had no chance: that outfit would take no one with glasses, which I was wearing, and, he insisted, I was much too tall. I laughed back at him and said, "What the hell, I'll try anyway." The notice mentioned the physical exam would be given the next morning at eight o'clock. I immediately took my glasses off, buried them in my shirt pocket under my jacket to give my eyes a little more time to accustom themselves to a glasses free existence, found the office the notice designated on the first floor, had my name put on the list and was told where the physical would take place. Then Shortie and I took off. I had something new to be pumped about. I wanted "in" to that outfit.

The next morning I showed up at the tent down the hill from the "Fort" where the physical examination was to be given. I arrived about fifteen minutes early. Others were collecting too, and, eventually, there were two dozen or so of us. All but one of that group were very young; there was one amongst us who was wearing

sergeant stripes and a shoulder patch representing one of the paratrooper outfits. I still wore my Acting Corporal stripes on the black band on my sleeve; the rest of us (that includes me) were all PFC's. We were brought into the tent, shown the dressing room, stripped down to our skivvies, and the examination began. My glasses were in my shirt pocket and the shirt was hanging on a hook in the dressing room. We formed a line and popped through, one at a time, from one station to another. It was all very automatic: a quick look, a quick spin, a cough, touch our toes, do a knee bend, read that chart (I listened to the man in front of me and parroted what he had said), and, in an hour, we were inspected, out of the line up, and back in the dressing room. While we were putting our garments back on our bodies, a sergeant from the medical unit came into the dressing room and read off a list of names (mine among them), and we were told to report to a room number on the first floor of the "Fort". Of the twenty or so of us that had taken the physical, almost all of us passed. This was my first sighting of Bill Justis and Tim Daly. I was tall, Bill was just a tad shorter than I, and Tim was well over six feet tall. We were three pretty big dudes for those days. I wouldn't get to know the two of them well for a few days yet, but we were engaged in sizing one another up, as will all the types of people who volunteer for such organizations.

We all wandered back up to the "Fort", found the room with the correct number, and sat on benches outside in the hall. In just a few moments we were called, one at a time, into the room. We were called in alphabetical order, and it wasn't too long before it was my turn. I entered the small office-like room which contained one desk and one chair, and seated in that chair behind that desk was a Captain: he wore a blue lozenge shaped patch, trimmed in yellow with the words "RANGERS" written across it in yellow. I entered the office in my most military manner, stood at attention in front of the desk, gave my full name and rank (PFC) and remained standing there at attention. The Captain gave me an "At Ease", and I came to parade rest and let my eyes come down to his. He sat there for a moment looking at me. He mentioned that I was a "big one", for whatever that was worth, then pointed at my black arm band with the corporal stripes, and told me that I would have to lose those. I grinned, took them off right then, and put them on the desk. The action seemed to satisfy him somewhat. (I had no illusions that I would be allowed to keep them wherever I went.) He asked me what I knew of Ranger Battalions, and I told him I knew only what I had read, but that I liked what I had read. He asked me several other background questions, my service folder was open in front of him, and my answers to his questions did not seem to disquiet him. He must have completely overlooked the part in my file about my vision, and that was all right with me. He asked me once more if I were sure about volunteering for a Ranger Battalion. I told him that I was sure. Then he told me they were going to break my butt in a lightening type training session. I grinned. He said it was

OK, then to pack up. We would be leaving there the first thing the next morning. I came to attention and saluted (Which was the wrong thing to do since I was "uncovered", wore neither a helmet nor a cap.), did an about face, and moved smartly out of the room.. I had made it. I wanted it very badly, badly enough to cheat to get it, and I got it. It would be quite awhile before I put my glasses back on again.

When I left the office I went out immediately searching for Shorty. He wasn't hard to find - flaked out on his sack. I came over next to him and sat on my sack. The look on my face must have told him most of the story, I told him the rest, of how I had cheated on the eye chart. (We both thought that was funny.) He noticed that my black arm band was gone, and I shrugged my shoulders. We both knew we would probably never see each other again after this next morning. A good friendship had been made and terminated in just a few short weeks, and we were both a little down about that. (It turned out that we were correct: We never saw each other again. I did get a letter from Shorty a couple of weeks after we parted, and I think that I remember answering it - maybe I didn't - but that was the end of a very good friendship) Shorty and the rest of the people from our draft were all assigned to the 10th Armored Division. His Acting Corporal stripes were taken away from him, and he was made into a Buck Sergeant on the spot. The reason I think I remember answering his letter is that I had to address it to "Sgt." Herbst. I wonder, now, how Shorty came through the war. I wonder how he is now, if he "is" now. Two or three weeks was all of the time we knew each other.

The orders for my assignment appeared on the bulletin board that night. There were eighteen or nineteen of us all together. One was the paratrooper who had broken a leg at Nijmegen and had been disqualified from jumping anymore; he was a sergeant, and to get into the Ranger Battalion, he had to give up his stripes - he agreed to that. The Ranger Battalion must have gotten some replacements from other repple-depples also, because of the nineteen of us, five were assigned to C Company, and, we found out later, there were other companies in worse shape than C Company.

The next morning we assembled on the road in front of the Fort with all of our gear, still not knowing one another, standing there edgily, when a six by drove up. We were loaded up and took off. It was early in the afternoon when we got to the Battalion. The Battalion was in reserve in a small village (I found out later we were in Belgium - I had no idea then.), and spread out all over the village. The same Captain who had interviewed us met us, gave us some new assignments, and turned us over to some non-coms who took us off to our companies. Bill, Tim, and I did not know each other yet, but we were assigned together to the 1st Platoon of C Company and taken down the street to a building which looked as if it had once been somebody's home. Amongst a group in front of the building

working on their weapons and equipment was a square shaped sort of man, with bowed legs, badly in need of a shave, who rose and came to us. He was introduced as "Sergeant Blowers". He was our new platoon sergeant. He did not have a true beard, but he struck me as one of those fellows who needed to shave at least twice a day, and he seemingly had missed, at least, a couple of turns. Sergeant Blower's face looked very tough, and very tired. It was a stern face for a young, brand new, green recruit to study. Blowers slowly surveyed the three of us, called to a person over his shoulder, and told him his new assistant was here. He meant me. The fellow whom he called, smaller, slimmer, helmet worn at a cocky angle, came up to me, crooked his finger at me, and I followed him.

That was the start. We were joining a group of people, the 5th Rangers (it was not necessary to say Battalion), who had done a heroic job of work, no matter how you measured it. The originals in the group, and there were many, had formed up as a battalion and trained in Kentucky. Most of them had come out of the Yankee Division which, I think, was numbered the 26th Division. I think they wore a shoulder patch with a YD on it. The men of the Division were mostly from the eastern United States, the New York area, the Boston area. They had gone through a strenuous training in Kentucky, then been sent over to Scotland to be trained some more by the British Commandos. They had practiced beach landings on the cliffs of Scotland. (While I was with this organization I listened to the stories of the older original characters, whom I admired, and whom I envied in a dim sort of way.) A few of them had been with the Commandos when they raided Dieppe on the French coast long before D-Day, a raid which, I seemed to recall, had turned into a minor disaster. Sergeant Blowers had been one of the American Rangers chosen to take part in that raid. The Ranger Battalion had been the first on the beach on D-Day in France, had climbed the cliffs, and fought on until they had a foothold. Later, it was these Rangers who had cleaned up, at a horrible cost, the Germans who had been surrounded at Brest. The stories I listened to made the fighting at Brest sound particularly fierce. They had done other jobs of work, and were assigned, eventually, to the Third Army, where they still were working under George's command. I believe that George and the Third Army got the two Ranger Battalions, and the First Army got the two paratrooper divisions.

Most of the people I was now amongst had gone through all of this, the rest, with the exception of Bill, Tim , and myself had gone through a great deal. A few of the others came as replacements after D-Day, another batch of them after Brest, and then there were the three of us. We were replacing men whom the others had known well and trusted, with whom they had sweated and gotten bloody, men with whom they had literally gone through hell. Some of the ones we were replacing had been injured and sent home, some of them were dead. The three of us were still eighteen and nineteen year old kids, still wet behind the ears, and we were supposed to replace

these other men. We three were the new replacements in the first platoon of C Company.

As you may probably guess, we were received in a variety of ways. A man named Peseroff, a Corporal, when we first met him, was the scariest, but he was the most human. He was scary because something strange had happened to his nervous system; half the nerves serving his face would not operate, the other half were normal: Peseroff could only smile with half of his face. If my memory is correct it was the left side that worked properly. It took some time to learn to "read" him. In the beginning none of us ever knew for sure. The right side of his face could not participate in any of his emotions - a complete half of a poker face. Peseroff was one of the originals in the outfit and still only a corporal. The man in charge of me was Stover, the bazooka man, who had been a replacement after D-Day, but he had been well blooded and was now a full member of the organization. Siegel, a sergeant not directly in my line of command, was the least likable, the most protective of his position. He was not the man that Peseroff was, or that another man named Calabreisi was. Siegel was not their equal by a long way, and, deep down, I think he knew it. He was also the one who made our training the most difficult. We expected the training to be tough, but there was no satisfying Siegel. We could do nothing to please him. Peseroff would let us know when things were all right, but never Siegel. Things that I have picked up about the nature of the human animal I started to pick up here. There is nothing like a great deal of stress to make the animal show himself, and all of these guys had been under stress for some time then, and they were looking forward toward more. They were, also, introducing the three of us to what stress was. They had their ways, and they used all of them.

The Battalion took four days to train their new replacements in a lightening-like session. To train us they all had to go through the same exercises, but it was old stuff to them and not a great problem. It was an eye opening session for the three of us new in the first platoon. Stover worked me over on the bazooka until I knew the bazooka well; he would accept nothing but complete understanding, and I agreed with him - I did want to know that tool well. There is no way I would ever be able to fire that thing the way Stover could, but I wasn't bad. (I remember once when we were working on a German pill box, I loaded Stover up, hit him on the helmet to let him know that all was ready, and he rose to one knee and fired. The round skipped in front of the bunker and into the port the machine gun was firing pout of, and exploded against the wall the back side. Stover was mad at himself, had me load him up again quickly, and then fired again. The second round went right in the port. It wasn't necessary any longer, but Stover just had to know that he could do it.) The new style bazooka rounds, the one with a head the shape a little smaller than half a tennis ball, would explode on contact rather than skipping off the ground. The

old style shaped like a smaller ice cream cone would skip madly. Stover told me stories of them skipping off tanks. Stover taught me that, when firing at a tank, to aim at the seam between the body of the tank and the turret, in order to weld the turret to the body. My aim, and my eyesight without my glasses, was not all of that good, but I was glad to have the information. Stover was a very different type of person, a little on the spooky side - the Marines would have thought him "gung ho". With the training session the three of us had entered our acceptance period. We were almost accepted. Almost.

After our training period was over, the Battalion was sent out to do a job of work, so the time came when it was necessary that I saw better than I could at the moment, and I put my glasses on and forgot to take them off. The Company Commander happened to see me with my glasses on, and all hell broke loose - Siegel went berserk. I was less than a perfect human being and had no right being in this organization of perfect human beings. The Company Commander proposed kicking me out of the organization, but he couldn't right then. Later on the First Sergeant convinced the Company Commander that I was big, that I was strong, that I was obedient, that I was dumb enough to volunteer, and that Stover had me well broken in. Stover finally helped convince the Company Commander that they could do worse, that it wouldn't hurt to let me stay. The Company Commander finally did agree to let me stay with the outfit, but I don't think he ever forgave me for "cheating" my way into a Ranger Battalion. He never let up. He never let me forget. Neither did Siegel. The First Sergeant did, however, and that helped, and Sergeant Blowers was amused by the whole fracas. Eventually the First Sergeant was wounded and Sergeant Blowers was promoted to replace him, which made things much easier. I had so much respect for Sergeant Blowers that if he said, "Shit", I would have asked him, "What color, sir?"

The first time we went into action, I had my eye on Sergeant Blowers all of the way. I followed everything that he did. I didn't dare get far from Stover, but Stover was crazy, and Sergeant Blowers was not crazy. He was alive, and he did things that needed to be done without question - he just did them.

I was never fully accepted by Stover; maybe my feelings about his sanity were leaking out, and he was connecting with them. It was also all right with me that Siegle felt anyway about me that he wanted; Siegel was in another squad, and Stover stood between the two of us. I could pretty well ignore him, which is what I did.

There were others in the platoon who were great: young men in one way, in age, but old men in experience, men who had seen things far beyond their years. I was slowly joining them, but I never was to achieve their status because the war with Germany was winding down to its last stages, so I was never to undergo things the original

members had. The older hands saw that, and most of them understood. And we weren't bad - the platoon needed the extra hands, and they taught us how to be good hands. We became what they trained us to be.

After some time, this thing happened that still seems to me to be unbelievable. It was something unique even to the veteran members of the platoon who, also, were not prepared for what we had just run into. I remember seeing Sergeant Blowers then a couple of times, and I don't believe I had, or have ever since, witnessed such quiet rage. Even Stover changed. This thing that happened was what we were now involved in, the liberation of Buchenwald.

II

That was where we were, Buchenwald, and none of us had ever heard the word before, and we certainly did not know of any place, or places like it. (When one was busy working for a man like George there was very little time or opportunity for keeping up with current events We might see "The Stars and Stripes" once a week, maybe not that often, and then what we all looked for was the Mauldin cartoon. By the time the one or two copies arrived and worked their way through the platoon they were so ragged there wasn't much worth reading anyway.)

Bill Justis and I, standing in the top of the tower, did not know we were at Buchenwald, we did not know what a Buchenwald was, but there in the tower, farthest from the main gate, we continued to speculate, and we were wrong on most counts.

We stood on that fourth floor munching our K Rations and looking out, studying the situation. Our first thoughts were that this was some kind of a prisoner of war camp: it had prisoners in it, this, and the other towers were for the guards, the table next to us was built to handle a machine gun, and to hold the ammunition boxes for a machine gun. We had all of that settled in our minds, and so far we were marginally correct. Further than that we had difficulty. We still had to wait an hour or a little more, to find out this place had the name "Buchenwald", and what a Buchenwald could be.

Sometime after we had finished out lunch we saw a truck come down the road between the towers and the fence. It stopped at every other tower, where it dropped off one man, and stopped at the already manned towers to pick up whoever was there. As we watched this we collected our gear, got it on our backs, and descended the stairs to wait our turn. Sergeant Blowers was in the cab next to the driver. A guy from the second platoon jumped out of the back of the truck, and Blowers called for us to get in, which we did with alacrity.

The two of us piled on to the back of the truck. There was just one more tower for us to stop at. We dropped off a man from the second platoon at that tower, wheeled around, and headed back up the road as fast as one would want to dry a six-by. After turning a corner,

we passed some permanent looking buildings and then that monstrous chimney which was now smokeless. Immediately ahead was a string of buildings two stories high, having a face with only a few barred windows. The buildings were covered with the same dark gray stucco as the towers. The roof was steeply peaked. At a point where those buildings bent off to the right, and in the middle of the bend, was a wide opening with a very heavy gate, now standing open. The opening was wide, and it was tall enough to accommodate a large truck. There was a walking lane on either side. At the gate we turned in the opposite direction, moved slowly down a well tended road through a manicured area of good houses - no, better than good. We didn't know it then, but the best of them was the home of Ilse Koch. Her husband was the Camp Commander, and from what we later heard about the two of them they deserved each other. Our truck then turned right again, away from the Koch's home, up a small hill, through some trees, to a much larger building, of the same style as all the others, and, obviously, a barracks building for the German guards and the camp workers. The truck stopped, Blowers jumped out, started us unloading, and told us the first platoon had the second floor room on the right. There were more than enough bunks for the people in our platoon, so we each picked out a bunk we liked and set ourselves up. The truck which had been following us with all of our gear had come by, and our second duffel bags were dumped out in the lobby of the building. We each had a duffel bag in which we kept a change of cloths, extra skivvies and stockings, our second set of boots, and any loot we might have thought worth collecting as we moved through Germany. (Very obviously none of us trying for large objects which would have to be carried around on our backs.)

When we had finished settling in and were coming back down the stairs and heading out the door, a long truck convoy could be seen rolling down the main road and through the gate to the camp down the main road, through the gate to the camp. On our way out the door Sergeant Blowers looked at us and said very quietly, "Field Hospital." He stopped us momentarily to tell us we would not be restricted from any area inside the camp, but the prisoners had to stay here a while yet, and it was our duty to see to it they did. Containing the prisoners was not expected to be any trouble because they understood the need, and they were being provided for in every way that we could think of: the field hospital had just arrived, a big mess unit was on the way, loads of PX rations were coming. Sergeant Blowers told us that some of the prisoners spoke English. Then he got even quieter, looked at the ground for as moment, raised his eyes, and looking over our heads, began very softly - we could barely hear him. He told us this is what was called a "Concentration Camp", that we were about to see things we were in no way prepared for. He told us to look, to look as long as our stomachs lasted, and then to get out of there for a walk in the woods. I had never know Sergeant Blowers to be like this. The man had seen everything that I could imagine could be seen, and this

place was having this effect on him. I didn't understand. I didn't know what a Concentration Camp was, or could be. I was about to.

Bill, Tim, and I started off through the trees, down the hill to the front gate which was only a couple of hundred yards away. The gate was a rectangular hole through the solid face of the building over which was office space and a hallway. High up above the opening for the gate was a heavy wooden beam with words carved into it in German script. In a clumsy way I attempted to translate the inscription to Bill and Tim as, "Work will make you free". Very likely that was not a very good translation. (My background, my heritage, is largely German, but I know little or nothing about the language.) The three of us headed through the gate, through the twenty or thirty feet to the other side of the building. We were slightly apprehensive of what we might see. Our antennae were up. We had been teased by bits of information, and we wanted to know more. The lane we were walking on bent to the right as we cleared the building. We had barely made the turn, and there it was. In front of us a good bit, but plainly visible.

The bodies of human beings were stacked like cord wood. All of them dead. All of them stripped. The inspection I made of the pile was not very close, but the corpses seemed to be all male. The bottom layer of the bodies had a north/south orientation, the next layer went east/west, and they continued alternating. The stack was about five feet high, maybe a little more; I could see over the top. They extended down the hill, only a slight hill, for fifty to seventy five feet. Human bodies neatly stacked, naked, ready for disposal. The arms and legs were neatly arranged, but an occasional limb dangled oddly. The bodies we could see were all face up. There was an aisle, then another stack, and another aisle, and more stacks. The Lord only knows how many there were.

Just looking at these bodies made one believe they had been starved to death. They appeared to be skin covering bones and nothing more. The eyes on some were closed, on others open. Bill, Tim, and I grew very quiet. I think my only comment was, "Jesus Christ." I can't guarantee that.

I have since seen the movie made about Buchenwald. The stack of bodies is vividly displayed in the movie, just as I saw it the first day, but it is not the same. In no way is it the same. The black and white film did not depict the dirty grey green color of those bodies, and, what it could not possibly capture, was the odor, the smell, the stink. Watching the movie was, in a way, a reliving of the first walk through those stacks of bodies.

The three of us looked, and we walked down the edge of those stacks. I know that I didn't count them - it wouldn't have mattered. We looked and said not a word. A group of guys from the company noticed us and said, "Wait till you see in there." They

pointed to a long building which was about two stories high, and butted up tightly to the chimney. It had two barn like doors on either end of the building we were looking at, and the doors were standing open. We turned and walked back to the building where we found others from our company, along with some of the prisoners milling around in the space between the bodies and the building. We moved gently through those people, through the doors and felt the warmth immediately. Not far from the doors, and parallel to the front of the building, there was a brick wall, solid to the top of the building. In the wall were small openings fitted with iron doors. Those doors were a little more than two feet wide and about two and a half feet high; the tops of the doors had curved shapes much like the entrances to churches. Those iron doors were in sets, three high. There must have been more than ten of those sets, extending down that brick wall. (My memory might be wrong about the exact number - it has been a long time - but there were many of those iron doors.) Most of the doors were closed, but down near the middle a few stood open. Heavy metal trays had been pulled out of those openings, and on those trays were partially burned bodies. On one tray was a skull partially burned through, with a hole in the top; other trays held partially disintegrated arms and legs. It appeared that those trays could hold three bodies at a time. And the odor, my God, the odor.

I had enough. I couldn't take it any more. I left the building with Bill and Tim close behind me. As we passed out the door someone from the company said, "The crematorium." Until then I had no idea what a crematorium was.

It dawned on me much later: the number of bodies which could be burned at one time, three bodies to a tray, at least thirty trays, and the Germans still couldn't keep up. The bodies on the stacks outside were growing at a faster rate than they could be burned. It was difficult to imagine what must have been going on.

Later that evening, sitting on the front steps of the barracks with a group of people from the company, Sergeant Blowers amongst us, the three of us started to pick up the parts of the story we had missed because we were on guard down at the towers. All of the German guards had packed up and moved out about three hours before our arrival, there were bits and pieces of personal gear still left around the barracks, but not much. We saw neither hide nor hair of those German guards. (Some of the guards were discovered later, but that will have to wait a moment.) When the Germans left the crematorium was still going full blast, burning up a storm, the chimney belching out that black smoke. Our First Sergeant, Sergeant Blowers, our Company Commander, and the Leader of the TD group found the source of the fuel, and played around with one thing and another until they figured our how to turn the damned thing off.

That was the start. That was just the "openers". There was more,

but it was impossible to assimilate it all at once. George had assigned us to this place for four days, ostensibly to keep the now-free prisoners off the roads he needed to supply his troops who were racing through Germany at the end of the war. The full explanation was given the prisoners, and there was no problem, they understood. George had assigned a whole field hospital to the place along with a big kitchen unit. He eventually sent in an engineering outfit with bulldozers to dig a mass grave for those bodies. We were doing everything we possibly could for the prisoners. Later on, when things became quieter, military government people arrived to help the prisoners get home - if there was a home for them to get to.

Now Bill, Tim, and I knew that this was not a prisoner of war camp. There were no captured troops from England, France, Russia, or the United States. There were Frenchmen, but they had not been part of the military.

A little later in the evening the three of us walked back into the camp, passed by the crematorium, the stacks of bodies, and wandered into the camp proper. There were temporary lights strung around for the medics to do their work. The prisoners came up to and surrounded us, moving with us as they jabbered, but they spoke a language we did not understand - they were probably speaking several languages we did not understand. There was the slightest of communication. They gave way, and moved along with us. We must have appeared as giants in their midst: we; well fed, healthy, strong, young men; they gaunt shrunken, their ugly striped uniforms hanging on them, some wearing those little pill box hats of the same material.

They were jabbering, and we wanted to listen, to understand, but there seemed to be no way we could. After some moments we figured out they wanted our cigarettes. In no time we were out of them - they just disappeared. We had nothing else with us they really wanted, but they stuck with us and guided us to another set of buildings, which had the look of large barns with wide doors in the middle of the front. Entering the first of these we found we were entering their home. There were stacks of bunks five or six high crowded together with, it seemed to me, very little room between a bunk and the one above it. (It was my thought that one would have a rough time merely rolling over.) The bunks were much too short even for short people. The stacks of bunks rose, the lower bunks serving as rungs of a ladder to the upper ones. How many hundreds of people slept in this one building was beyond me. Then there were all of those dead bodies outside that must have come from here. Where did the Germans get them all?

Just inside the door were people on the lower bunks so close to death they didn't have the strength to rise. They were, literally, skeletons covered with skin - nothing more than that - there

appeared to be no substance to them. The next day when the press arrived, one of the photographers for "LIFE" magazine had one of the really bad ones propped up against the door frame in the daylight. He took the photograph, but out of sight in the darkness of the building, behind the man, were the people propping him up. I have seen that photograph several times in the years since, and every time I see it my stomach rolls a little, my mind goes into some kind of a dance, and it takes me a little time to return to normal. There are still altogether too many things that flood my mind once a trigger is pulled. (Right at this moment my fingers are racing over the keyboard, typing faster than I have ever typed in my life, making typing errors at a greater rate than usual. It is as if my mind is vomiting, trying to purge itself of this mental bile.)

Later we were told the medical unit was moving around searching for the most desperate cases, in order to get them to the doctor as quickly as possible. They told us the story of one prisoner who was so close to death that even thinned chicken broth was too rich for his stomach. The doctors were doing everything they could, trying mightily; but in too many cases they had no chance at all and would lose in spite of their best efforts.

It didn't come to me immediately - probably because I had been immersed in an all male society for more than a year then, but we had seen no female prisoners. That thought dawned on me as we trudged out way back to the barracks. The last trip to the dormitory barn had been enough for one day, and we three got out of there. We were about to do what Sergeant Blowers had told us to do: take a walk in the woods. We headed for the woods talking softly to each other, the talk full of wonderment: the how's the whys. We had no answers. As limited as our combat experience had been, we had seen dead men, we had seen wounded men from both sides, ours and the German's and, with the immediacy of battle, with no time for conjecture, we had done what we could for the wounded, and then had got on with the job that had to be done. None of us, no one in our company, even amongst those who had been the originals, was prepared for what we were now surrounded by. It was not "human". It was not real. But it was real, it was the only life that some of the prisoners had known for years. Maybe it was all too human. Maybe this is what we are.

III

Later that evening we were sitting, a bunch of us from the company, on the front steps of the barracks, talking. Sergeant Blowers was in the middle of the group. There were questions, far more questions than there were answers. Those of us assigned to the towers at the beginning had missed a great deal of what had gone on, and we were catching up. We were alternately talking and listening - I, listening almost totally - and the non-coms who had been with the Company Commander and the leader of the Tank Destroyer outfit were doing most of the explaining. (I suppose that I should note that the Tank Destroyer outfit was long gone; they had departed while Bill and I were still in the tower.)

Amongst other things, Sergeant Blowers was explaining our duties while we were here: we were to stand guard four hours at a time, and then take eight hours off; there would be one of us in every other tower most of the way around the camp. We would be covering all of the holes we had ripped in the fence. The first platoon, ours, had the midnight to four, and the noon to four shifts. He assigned us towers, too. I drew the same one that Bill and I had manned that afternoon, the one furthest from the main gate. Bill was on one side of me nearer the gate, and Tim was on the other side. Stover would be closer to the gate, up a pair of towers from Bill. The hours were not what I considered the best, but, what the hell - four on and eight off.

Sergeant Blowers told us some things about the Commander of Buchenwald and his wife. We could see their house down the hill through the leafless trees from our seats on the front steps. Blowers painted a picture of truly despicable human beings. The wife, Ilse Koch, favored jodhpurs, boots, and a riding crop. He told us this story about her: once, she ordered all of the Jewish prisoners in the camp stripped and lined up; she then marched down the rows of them, and, as she saw a tattoo she liked, she would touch that tattoo with her riding crop; the guards would take the man away immediately to the camp hospital where the doctors would remove the patch of skin with the tattoo, have it tanned, and, with others, patched together to make lamp shades. There were three of

those lamp shades; the history books say there were two, but there were three. One of them disappeared shortly after we arrived. (I have heard the other two are in a museum some place now, but I am not sure of this.) This may give you a glimmer of an idea of what Ilse Koch was like - and her husband - and the camp doctors.

While we were gathered on the front steps of the barracks, talking, a jeep drove up and parked in front of us. The driver, a First Lieutenant, asked, "Is there a Sergeant Blowers here?" Now a Ranger Battalion is a pretty proud organization, that pride manifested in a variety of ways. One of the ways became apparent to me right then. Sergeant Blowers slowly got to his feet, gave a kind of a sloppy salute, and said, "Yes, sir. Right here, Sir." If that officer had been a Ranger officer Blowers would have come to his feet smartly, saluted crisply, and his response would have been sharp and snapped off. If that officer had been from some other combat organization, the response would have been just a slight bit less sharp. This officer was neither a Ranger officer nor an officer from some other combat organization; he was, however, and officer he rated a salute and a polite answer. That is exactly what he got; a salute and a polite answer. To his credit he seemed not to expect more. He untangled himself from the jeep, telling Sergeant Blowers to stay where he was, came up to us, and introduced himself. He told us he was an interpreter, able to speak Yiddish and other eastern European languages. (He might have been Jewish himself.) He was here to work with the prisoners, and he expected there might be times when he could use some help, not that he expected any trouble, but just that he might need help from time to time, maybe assistance searching for specific prisoners. He explained to us that his own outfit would not arrive for several days more, and he was working alone and would not have enough time to wander about searching for people. He planned on finding English speaking prisoners who could go about with us to help. He acted apologetic about it all which was the best first step he could have taken. Sergeant Blowers let him know there would be no problem, and asked if he would like some non-coms to work with him. The whole thing was arranged. The lieutenant got the help he needed.

Then Sergeant Blowers started questioning the Lieutenant about things which we did not yet understand. From the Lieutenant we found out that most of the prisoners at the prison now were political prisoners from Eastern Europe; there were a few French, fewer still from the low countries, with just a smattering of Danes and Norwegians. Only a very few Jews remained at Buchenwald, most of them in terrible physical shape. The Jews who had been, to any degree, healthy had been marched away from the camp weeks ago. No one knew why they had been taken away, or where they had been taken. Originally, in the camp, the Jews and the non-Jews were largely separated and given different food rations and different jobs to do. Treatment of the prisoners varied also, depending, again, on ethnic origin. There were a few women prisoners, but we

wouldn't see them for a time as they had been taken immediately to the field hospital where they had been checked over and cleaned up. Those who were able began working with the American nurses, or helping out in the kitchen. They gave the impression they no longer felt like slave laborers; in fact, they seemed only too glad to assist. There were children prisoners, some of them born in the camp. The females had been forced into prostitution often. The Lieutenant told us all of this and more, things that he had learned interviewing prisoners in the hospital.

As he was leaving Sergeant Blowers promised there would be people at the hospital in the morning to help. The Lieutenant thanked us and cranked up the jeep. He was assigned to a military government type of unit which was currently tied up with other things farther west in Germany, and which would be along shortly to relieve us.

After listening to all of this, a half dozen or so of us went down to the Camp Commander's home, walked in, and looked around. It was a grand home, luxuriously furnished, but messy now from the many feet trudging through it all day long. We looked for the lamp shades - we found only the lamp bases where they had been. In the rear of the house was a pantry between the dining room and the kitchen. In one of the pantry drawers was some flatware. I took a few of the teaspoons and buried them in my jacket pocket, and I think Bill got a couple also. (One of my brothers has mine now, someplace. I do remember I got them home.)

Then, since we were to go on guard duty from midnight to four in the morning, we thought a little sleep was in order, so we returned to the barracks, threw our blankets across our mattresses, crawled under them, and slept, or tried to sleep. My mind was full. Sleep did not come easily. The beds were neither better nor worse than beds in army camps in the United States; there wasn't anything special about the mattresses either, but it was far better than sleeping on the ground. (Two days later we discovered the mattresses to be loaded with bed bugs, or lice, or some other kinds of little creepy crawlers. Before we left, people from the hospital came over and fumigated us, our clothes, our equipment, the whole place. When we cleared out of Buchenwald a few days later we were free of the little critters.)

Sergeant Blowers broke us out a little after eleven o'clock that night. We gathered our equipment and piled into a truck and went around the watch towers, jumping out as we came to our assignments. Blowers would call our name from the cab, we would jump, and the guy from the third platoon we were relieving would jump in. I climbed the stairs to the top floor using the flashlight handed to me by the man I relieved. As I stood on the top floor looking out, I saw nothing. There was no electricity so the lights in the tower didn't work; the searchlights were useless. If there had been anything for me to see I wouldn't have been able to see it anyway.

I had with me my Garand rifle, the rifle belt with a full canteen hanging on it, a field jacket over my woolen shirt. The pockets of the field jacket were loaded - in the top left pocket was a toothbrush which I had quit using for its primary purpose once I started cleaning my rifle with it. There was a mess kit spoon right beside it, along with a pack of cigarettes and two or three cigars. In the top right pocket was another pack of cigarettes and some Hershey bars. The two lower pockets were loaded with bits and pieces from the ration boxes; instant coffee, instant cocoa, packets of sugar, a mish-mash of junk, all of it necessary. Oh, yes, in one of my shirt pockets I had one of those cigarette lighters which could light a cigarette without showing a flame, my zippo lighter, and an open pack of cigarettes. My trouser pockets were, largely, empty. My wallet which I always carried, was in my back pocket on the right side, but that was about it. (We were not allowed to have U. S. Currency with us, but I still had a dollar bill folded and hidden away in the corner of my wallet. I was keeping a diary on it in very minute print. I still have it somewhere.) The rest of my gear was spread out around my bunk back up in the barracks. I had enough with me. I was prepared for the night.

As I stood by the machine gun table in the dark, looking out, there was nothing to see, and I could see nothing. I started by stacking my rifle in the corner, took off my rifle belt and put it on the table, and, leaning on the table, I started thinking about all of the things that had happened during the day. Strange things. Things I could not yet understand. I thought about those things, and questions entered my mind, but their were no answers. Finally I merely slumped and realized how good a cup of coffee would taste. I had my canteen cup. There was water in my canteen. There were packets of instant coffee (horrible stuff) in my pocket along with some sugar. I had everything I needed for a cup of coffee except heat. With the help of the flashlight I started scrounging around, finding little wood chips all over the place. The trench knife from my belt helped me make some more of them, and I ended up with a tidy bunch of wood chips. I built the fire right in the middle of the machine gun table, heated the water in my canteen cup and made myself a cup of coffee. After sweeping the fire from the table and stomping on the sparks, I sat on a different part of the table, lit a cigar, drank the coffee, and looked out at the darkness. Less than a half an hour later I saw a fire in Bill's tower and guessed that he had seen what I was up to, and done the same thing.

It was a quiet and boring tour of duty, but I couldn't quiet my mind. Time took forever to pass, but it finally did pass. Hours later I could see the headlights of the truck as it started its rounds, the platoon sergeant of the second platoon in charge this time. The man who relieved me in my tower had been a replacement at the same time as I was, and, like me, was an assistant bazooka man. I told him how I had made coffee and that there were probably

enough wood chips up there so he could make himself a cup. He did not have a pack of instant coffee with him so I went through my pockets, found a couple of packets and some sugar and jumped on the truck. Bill was already there. He smiled and told me he had seen my little blaze, and had figured it out. Tomorrow we would really be ready.

We finished the trip around the camp. When we got back to the barracks I fell into the sack and was asleep instantly. I slept until after nine, when Bill woke me up, woke Tim up, and we did our morning ablutions in the latrine that was off our room. We then headed out to the mess unit for breakfast. The cooks were not bothered that we were late because they knew what we were up to and they were cooking all of the time anyway. We were not fussy about what we ate - it was hot, it was edible, it was nourishing, and it was one hell of a lot better than K-Rations. (We seldom ever saw C-Rations, which were a great deal tastier than K-Rations, but were still too new then. They hadn't worked their way down to us.)

While we were sipping coffee after breakfast, a great commotion broke out down at the gate, and it grabbed our attention. We wandered in that direction, coffee cups in hand. A bright and shiny jeep came through the gate, with this little fellow standing in front of the passenger seat, holding onto the windshield. His helmet was gleaming and elaborately decorated, his uniform spic and span, his pistol belt highly polished and oddly shaped, and, by God, there he was: it was George himself, and he was touring this place. From time to time the jeep would stop and he would ask questions. In front of the crematorium the jeep stopped and he alighted, walked inside, and he was out of sight for some minutes, appearing again with a very stiff back. Into the jeep again, and he was all over the place in just a few minutes. He passed us on the way out, and it was obvious he was some kind of mad. I would not have wanted to cross that man right then. Damn, he looked mad, about as mad as I had ever seen anyone look. The jeep sped back out the gate and on down the road, and George sat. The jeep did not waste time clearing the area.

Along with George were a great number of other vehicles filled with the press corps. (I suppose we would have to call them media representatives today.) The photographers, both still and film types were busy, swarming all over the place. The three of us were due back on guard duty in just a short time, so we brought our coffee cups back to the mess tent, and headed for the barracks.

Now that we had gone through a tour of duty at the towers, we knew what it was we wanted to take along with us. I fully intended to load up with candy bars, instant cocoa, and a bunch of other good things to stash away in one of the tower cupboards. I found a few more cigars. (No one else in the platoon smoked them so I got all of the cigars that came in the PX ration box.) I had enough

cigarettes. I went to a corner of the room and grabbed a lunch K-Ration. I had bulging pockets in my field jacket. I was not worried about ammunition - there was more than enough in my rifle belt, and there wouldn't be any need for the bag of bazooka rounds. I rinsed out my canteen and refilled it. I was ready. Gathering everything together, a group of us slowly made our way down the front steps, where we waited to be collected by Sergeant Blowers.

Eventually Sergeant Blowers came down the hall, out of the door, and onto the front steps with the rest of us. He told that we wouldn't be having a truck anymore, we were to walk around to the towers from now on. This was no problem. The walk was just a comfortable one. We were in no kind of formation: we just went on down the road in two's and three's, talking amongst ourselves and moving on toward the towers, our rifles comfortably slung on our shoulders. Walking was not a strange thing to us. Eventually I got to my tower, crawled up the staircase, and relieved the fellow from the third platoon. I set my things down and surveyed the scene in front of me. I stacked my rifle in the corner and threw my rifle belt on the machine gun table. There was a tiny sized char mark on the table by now, the word apparently having been passed around. It was a warm afternoon so I took my jacket off, dropped it on the table, and leaned on the shelf of the opening for awhile. After a bit I crawled up on the table and sat on it cross legged. I dug a cigar out of my jacket, lit it, and enjoyed it, and I studied the landscape around the camp. There were some heavily wooded areas around the outside of the camp, and the spring weather was turning the leaf buds a fuzzy green color. I imagined that it would be very beautiful there in the summer with all of the tree leafed out.

I was ruminating in this manner when I heard a tiny voice, and my attention came back to the inside of the camp. I could see nothing, but I heard the voice again, under me, down near the fence. I scrunched forward on the table to where I could see almost straight down. There, right in the middle of the hole in the fence, looking up, calling me, was this very small person. I waved my arm at him, letting him know that it was all right to come on through the fence, to come up the tower. He did so immediately. The sound of his footsteps coming up the stairs was almost instantaneous. I barely had time to get off the table and over to the stair opening before he was beside me.

He was very young, very small, and he spoke no English. He was dressed in bits and pieces of everything, ragged at best, and very dirty. He chattered up a storm and I could not understand one word. First, I got him to slow down the talk, then I tried to speak to him, and he could not understand a word I said. We were at a temporary stalemate. We started again from scratch, the both of us deciding that names were the proper things with which to start, so we two traded names. I no longer remember the name he taught me, and I wish so badly, so often, I could remember. Our conversation

started with nouns, naming things, and progressed to simple verbs, actions, and we were busy with that. As we progressed I reached over into my field jacket to pull things out of the pocket to name. I came across a chocolate bar, and gave him the word "candy". He repeated it, and I corrected him, and he repeated it again, and he had the pronunciation close. I tore the wrapper off the chocolate bar and showed him the candy. He was mystified. It meant nothing to him. He had no idea what it was or what he was to do with it. I broke off a corner and put it in my mouth and chewed it. I broke off another corner and handed it to him and he mimicked my actions. His eyes opened wide. It struck me that he had never tasted chocolate. It was tough to imagine, but there it was. He took the rest of the candy bar slowly piece by piece, chewed it, savored it. It took him a little while but he finished the candy bar, looking at me with wonderment the whole time. While he was eating the bar, I searched around for the old wrapper, found the word "chocolate " on it, pointed to the word, and pronounced the word "chocolate". He worked on the correct pronunciation. I am sure that was the first candy the little fellow had ever had. He had no idea what candy was until then. We continued. We worked out words for those things close around us, and while we were doing that, he was learning a bit of English, and I was not learning a word of his language - I do not know what language he spoke. This wasn't something that happened consciously, it was just something that happened.

The rest of my four hour tour was spent with him. I pretty well ignored what happened in the rest of the camp. There was nothing much going on down in my corner, so it was easy to ignore. My whole world shrank to the inside of the fourth floor of the tower and the young boy. Toward the end of the tour, I found in a pocket of my field jacket one of those blocks of compressed cocoa which came in the K-Rations, and the two of us constructed a hot cup of cocoa for ourselves. We used the same method I had used the night before to make a cup of coffee. A canteen cup is rather a large cup and the two of us shared it. On the first sip he looked at me with a large smile and said the word "chocolate". We were starting to communicate. I gave him other things from the K-Ration packages, among them a small can with cheese and bits of bacon, which we opened with the can opener I wore on my dog tag chain. This meant he had to study the dog tags. His curiosity was immense. He ate the cheese mixture (which I ate only when I was very hungry), and sorted out the words "cheese" and "bacon", and he loved the stuff. It did not even begin to enter my mind that he might have been Jewish and shouldn't have been eating bacon. I made up my mind to really load up before I came to the tower the next day.

That's the way the tour went - time passed - and it was all so pleasant. The little fellow was a joy scampering around. I figured him to be somewhere between five and eight years old, but I was probably wrong, on the low side. Later, when I thought more about it, I realized whatever growing he had done had been on the rations

of that camp. No great growth could be expected from a diet like that. When we split at the end of the four hours, he pointed to my pack of cigarettes. My first thought was that I didn't want him to smoke them, but then I remembered the events yesterday in the camp when my pack of cigarettes simply disappeared. Cigarettes were for barter; they were exchange material. I had no idea how rich one was when one had a whole pack of cigarettes. To these people cigarettes were money, and I was getting them free from PX rations. When we parted I loaded him up with the candy bars I had, and my extra pack of cigarettes. He had them all inside his shirt and went streaking back through the whole in the fence and on up the hill. After I was relieved and heading back up the hill, I saw Tim coming down the road behind me and I slowed until he caught up. When we got to Bill's tower, Bill was waiting for us, and the three of us walked on up the road together.

As the three of us approached the gate area, we noticed the place was in a kind of a mild uproar. All of the press people were still there and they had been joined by a lot of big shots from the army. Buchenwald was filled with those who had to "spectate". People were walking around and through the aisles of those stacks of dead bodies. To me this was the final indignity. It was an exhibition. God, help us. Those people in the stacks were dead, they were gone. Nothing could really hurt them further, but it hurt me that they were now an exhibition. The three of us at the gate stood there, looked, turned our backs, and walked away. All of the way from the tower I had been telling Bill and Tim about the little kid. Bill had noticed the two of us in the tower. I had had the kid standing on the table and I put my field jacket on him, which was much, much too large for him; then I put my steel helmet on his head, and the two of us giggled. On the way back up the road our moods lightened a little with the stories about the little fellow, we had started to feel a little better. We got to the gate and saw the carnival atmosphere, and our good spirits vanished. Scowling, we quietly walked back to the barracks. We had to go near the Commandant's house, and all of the "tourists" were lined up to go through another "exhibit", where someone was busy telling "Ilse" stories. That was enough for me. I was glad to get back to the barracks.

I had not had a full night's sleep in a long while, and I was thinking of a nap with anticipation. At the bunk I stripped off my excess junk and flaked out. I lay there with my eyes closed, but sleep was not to be. My mind was just too crowded. I did rest my bones, my muscles, but I could not rest my mind. I have no idea how long I stayed that way, but after awhile a bunch of guys in the platoon thought we ought to go over to the mess tent for some dinner, and they shook me out of my lethargy. We headed for the mess tent some of talking about the what had been going on all day long with the press and the visitors. Some of our guys had been disgusted by a bunch of nurses or WACs in their Class A uniforms taking picture of the naked dead. It was not the display of the

genitals that shook some of us up; it was that final indignity, the exhibition. Some one mentioned, while we were eating, that the engineers would be here tomorrow to bury those poor things. That made me feel a little better; no one could hurt them anymore after their burial. The trays at the crematorium would be emptied also. It would not be the most desirable of burials, but we would be rid of part of the "exhibit".

There was other talk too, and I was turning into one hell of a listener. It seemed that George had become so angry at what he had seen in the camp that he scooted into the nearest major town, Weimar, broke the mayor of the town out, and told him he wanted every citizen up the next morning, ready to march to Buchenwald, and through Buchenwald so as to see what the German peoples were responsible for. The engineers were not to bury the dead until after the grand tour by the German townspeople.

There was also some talk at the table about our future at this camp. Our Company Clerk, who normally stayed with Battalion Headquarters, was with us, and he had heard that we were to be relieved of duty here at Buchenwald in a day or two, because George had another job of work he wanted us to do. This generated a lot of speculation. The nature of the war was changing drastically; there were no longer pitched battles for real estate, only occasional fire fights, and always snipers as we went through towns and villages. George was in full gear now, and we were blowing through Germany in a hurry. It was a mess. There were times when our own commanders had no idea where we were, and, certainly, the Germans found out the hard way. We were blowing right through the maps that had been issued, and there was no place to get more in a hurry. This kind of talk occupied a sizable portion of the conversation while we ate our dinner. (One hesitates to say "dined" under these conditions.) We returned to the barracks and sat on the front steps and talked some more, and the carnival atmosphere dimmed as the "tourists" departed.

Slowly, as it darkened, we slipped off, one at a time, for the sleep we needed. I fell asleep in my skivvies under a blanket and slept so soundly that, if I dreamed, I was completely unaware of what I dreamed, and thank goodness for that.

Sergeant Blowers broke us out about eleven o'clock, and we started cranking up. The showers in the barracks were working with warm water. Somebody had been doing some things around the camp. This was a new experience. My last shower might have been over in England as best I could remember. All of us were dressed, packed up, and ready at almost the same time, so we left the barracks and shoved off down the road to the towers, passing Sergeant Blowers at the front door. Bill, Tim, and I walked together in the coolness of that early spring night, turning at the front gate to go on down the dirt road. We were talking about things we had heard in the

mess tent, those things concerning our near future. The Company Clerk had been sure of just a few things, and we were left to speculate about the rest. Some of the things we were unsure of and were speculating on were hanging us up. There were voices of the people walking behind us, and we made the assumption that it was Stover and some of the other guys. We thought maybe they could answer our questions. We stopped in the dark, turned to ask a question, as if we were addressing our own people. Instead of an answer this well-modulated voice came out of the dark, "Pardon, me?" We knew immediately we were not speaking to Stover.

Looking at each other wonderingly we stopped and waited for the two people walking behind us to catch up to us. When they did, one of them said, "I am sorry. I did not understand you." That was not Stover. Very definitely that was not the way Stover spoke. There were two of them and they were speaking English. They were wearing parts of the uniforms worn by the prisoners at Buchenwald. We were perplexed. They introduced themselves. Both of them spoke English better than we. They explained their positions; both of them had been professors in universities in Eastern Europe. They had not been sympathetic with the leaders of NAZI Germany, and had been arrested by the SS. They were not Jewish so they were merely political prisoners. This they told us as we continued to walk to our towers. We immediately forgot about our near futures and were captivated by these two new people; we three asking questions, they answering them. When we reached Bill's tower we stopped. I looked at Bill and told him I was going to go on down to my tower to relieve the guy who was there, but I would be right back. Tim agreed to the same thing. We both wanted Bill to hold these (ex) prisoners so that we could hear more of what they had to say. We promised to be back in ten or fifteen minutes. Bill agreed and the three of them turned into his tower. (Those two had heard everything we said, and understood it, and knew exactly what we were up to.) Tim and I took off quickly to relieve the people from the third platoon in our towers. To satisfy myself that the post I was about to stand was a wasted effort, I went up to the fourth floor and looked out, and there was nothing to see in the darkness. I came back downstairs and was starting back up the road about the same time as the fellow who Tim had relieved came by. As we walked together I told him what we had run in to, and, all fired up, he joined me in entering Bill's tower.

As we entered, I noticed the lights shining on the second floor, and that surprised me. (My tower had been dark, and I hadn't tried any switches. It did not surprise the fellow from the third platoon. He told us the searchlights would work too, if we tried them, but it was a wasted effort as there was nothing going on out there anyway.) Someone, during the day, had restored electricity to the camp. There were now lights in all of the towers, and the public address system for the camp worked. The camp was returning to normal in a physical sense - not the German normal, our normal.

We sat at the table on the second floor, and Tim joined us, and time got away from us. When our relief showed up four hours later we were still there, still on the second floor, still listening. There was no one on guard down at that corner this night - more interesting things were happening.

We heard stories that night. Those two men had been non-Jewish prisoners at Buchenwald for over four years. They were intelligent. They had seen everything. They were aware of everything that had happened at the camp. We asked them questions and we were given answers. We were flooded with information. There is no way I could present those stories as we heard them, chronologically, after this great a time. What I remember now are bits and pieces, and certain of those bits surface more rapidly than others. We sat, that night, around the table on the second floor of Bill's tower: Bill, Tim, the man from the third platoon, the two professor prisoners, and myself, and we talked. In one way the talk was an interrogation: four of us with insatiable curiosities, two who could satisfy those curiosities. Four of us asking questions, two providing the answers. There were times when we lit sterno cans and made ourselves some instant coffee, but the talk never ceased. The four of us emptied our pockets of the little goodies we were carrying, and, spreading them out on the table top, made them available to everyone. We kept talking and time disappeared. The minds of the four of us grew and stretched in terms no psychoanalysts would ever be able to measure. Four hours of education happened that night which could have happened no place else.

Of the events at Buchenwald described by the two professors I remember some. I wish I could remember them all, but I can't; there was altogether too much for my mind to absorb. I will make an attempt at remembering a few of those events here, the easiest one first: I told the two professors about the young person who had been at my tower the past afternoon, and described him as best I could. They thought they knew which of the young boys in the camp it was and believed he had been born at Buchenwald. The only life he knew was that of the concentration camp. There was no way he could have known about chocolate candy before this afternoon. That flipped me.

One story: The German army had been losing men on the Russian front because they were freezing to death. Some had been still alive when brought to the field hospitals, but had died in spite of the best efforts of the German doctors. Those field hospitals had requested some research on how to revive human beings who were very nearly frozen to death, but were still alive. The research had been done at Buchenwald. Groups of Jewish men had been taken outside on winter nights, stripped, and sprayed with a mist of water until they were nearly dead. They were then trundled into the hospital, and every effort was made to revive them. Every effort failed. The ungrateful Jewish prisoners just went ahead and died, in spite of

the best efforts of German medicine at the time. Finally, some bright medical type thought there might be a kind of animal heat that would revive them. They took one more group out, freezing them until they were nearly dead, brought them back into the hospital, and put them into bed with naked women. Their animal desires would revive them, or so the theory went. It goes without saying that experiment failed - again. The still ungrateful prisoners just continued to die.

Another story: There had been a factory a couple of kilometers down the railroad line from Buchenwald which was manufacturing something that was in demand by the German government. It was not clear to me then, nor is it now, what the plant had been making, but, in any event, it was the place where most of the political prisoners worked. Some Jewish prisoners worked there too, but they were only trusted with the menial jobs. One particular night our bombers flew over the camp to the factory, which they pulverized. They leveled it completely. Everyone working there was killed, but that didn't seem to matter to the two professors; not one bomb had missed the factory, not one bomb had fallen inside Buchenwald. The two professors thought that was remarkable - to be able to bomb with such precision. To listen to the two was to get the feeling they believed it was a blessing to die in a bombing raid rather than in other circumstances at Buchenwald. The dead were better off, and the factory was out of business also. The Germans had made no effort to rebuild it. It had all happened not too long ago.

Another story (to me the most gruesome): German doctors at the camp were doing research on some human diseases. Groups of Jewish prisoners would be selected (which must have been some kind of an admission they were human beings) and inoculated with the diseases. They would then be observed, and all of their reactions charted until death occurred. A post mortem of the body would be done, and those organs affected by the disease would be preserved and stored. The doctors would then move onto another disease, repeating the process. A building in the camp, near the hospital, held all of those preserved specimens. The two prisoners told us of the building and its location, how we could find it in the morning if we were so inclined. In that building were rooms devoted to each of the organs: a kidney room, a liver room, a heart room, etc., etc., etc. The two named some of the diseases studied, but I have forgotten (willfully?) which they mentioned.

A story: No. About what they did with the women prisoners. No. I quit. No more.

That was probably the most brutal night I have ever lived through. Enough. A major reason I need a catharsis.

The next morning we did a check on the building, and there they were. Rooms full of bottles of organs, all neatly and voluminously

labeled. We turned and walked away. I had had enough. Any prisoner could tell me anything he wished from now on, and I would believe. That building was enough.

There was not much sleeping that morning after we were relieved and returned to the barracks. Later I had breakfast and went for a long walk away from the camp. Part of the time I was alone, part of the time I was with Bill, part of the time I was Tim, part of the time I was with some of the others, but I could not stand constant company.

After seeing the organ building and my walk in the woods, I still had a few hours before my next tour of guard duty. I spent the time straightening my gear out and loading up the pockets of my field jacket. I expected the young boy would be by again, and I wanted to be able to give him everything I could.

After a quickly gobbled lunch at the mess tent we took off for our towers and relieved the third platoon men. I had barely reached the top floor when the young fellow came running up the steps. I hadn't seen him out in the field on the other side of the fence, but there he had been watching, waiting for me. The first thing he got was another chocolate bar, and he took his time with that while we worked some more on our language problem. We made another cup of cocoa, this time over a sterno can rather than a fire on the table. I tried to give him some boxes of K-Rations, but, hell, he was eating better than that at the mess tent. Maybe those K-Rations would be barter some day - that was all right with me. I had more cigarettes to give him when we parted too.

While he was scrambling around, he grabbed my rifle, and I jumped quickly. It was loaded with a fresh clip in place, a round in the chamber, and the safety was on. I didn't want anything to happen to him accidentally, so I took it away from him and unloaded it, took the clip out, removed the round from the chamber, looked it over carefully, and gave it back to him. He took it in an awkward manner, and aimed it even more awkwardly. The rifle was too long and heavy for him to handle comfortably so I had him rest the barrel on the edge of the opening and set it on his shoulder properly, helped him squeeze the trigger and the hammer snapped. He understood immediately. I pulled the bolt again, and this time he did it all on his own. The spring on the bolt was a little too much for him, but the rest he could handle all right. I would cock it and he pulled the trigger many times. Then I went to the table where I had placed the ammunition after I had cleared the rifle. I took a loose round and jammed the slug between the boards loosened it from the cartridge and poured the powder out in the middle of the table. I set the slug aside and took the cartridge with the live firing cap to him and loaded it into the rifle. When he pulled the trigger this time he got the sharp "snap" of the firing cap firing. He was delighted. We had to do it again, and again. In a

little while there was quite a pile of powder on the table. We stopped and went to the table - I made him stand back a bit - and I lit the powder with a match. It burned rapidly and made a big cloud of smoke. He enjoyed that immensely. I thought then that we had wasted enough ammunition, so I just leaned back against the table, crossed my arms, and watched him as he fondled the rifle, aiming it repeatedly. The two of us had just gone through about sixteen rounds for an M1 Garand, and no one had been hurt. To my small friend it was entertainment and education of a sort; to me, it was a chance to observe him.

We stopped all of that nonsense with the rifle and were making another cup of cocoa when we were interrupted.

IV

Over the head of the little fellow, down the hill from us in the back of the tower, and coming up the same valley we had traveled the day of our arrival, I saw a gang of about thirty or forty of the prisoners still wearing their striped garb. They were heading back toward the camp, which mystified me, because they should not have been outside of the camp in the first place. It was a busy group, full of chatter, and they paid no attention to us in the top of the tower as they approached. I picked up the rifle, put a new full clip in it, pulled the bolt which seated a round, rested the butt of the rifle on the edge of the opening, pointed it almost straight up in the air, and squeezed the trigger. That had the effect I wanted - I had gained their attention. The group stopped and looked at us, chatter coming from all of them at once, none of it that I could tell in English. Their hand signs made it obvious they were returning to the camp and only wanted to come back in through the hole in the fence. My orders had been to keep the prisoners in, not to keep them out, so I waved them on in. I unloaded the rifle and set it back in the corner. As they passed the tower I noticed that one of them, one in the middle of the group, had his hands tied behind his back, and a rope tied around his neck. He was being led back into the prison. The commotion was centered around that individual. The Buchenwald prisoners were all talking and gesturing, some of them looking up at me, trying to explain what they were doing. It was futile. Whatever it was they were doing was all right with me so long as they headed back through the hole in the fence and were returning to where they were supposed to be. The little fellow in the tower with me became all excited and tried to explain things to me. After a bit, I got the idea that the person on the end of the rope had been one of the German guards at the prison camp, and these people found him in a small village near the camp. They were bringing him back.

While the boy was making these things clear to my slow mind, I was wondering how in the hell the prisoners had gotten out of the camp in the first place, which, of course, wasn't all that important as they were back now. When he had communicated as much of the story as I was going to understand he let me know he wanted to catch up

to the group and join them. I got out the cigarettes I had brought down for him, along with a bunch of candy bars, and gave them to him. He thanked me in his language, scampered down the steps, through the hole, and on up to the main body of the camp as fast as his little legs could carry him.

It was then, too, that I noticed a lot of action up in the camp. Something important was happening there. People were scurrying about, and most of the prisoners were headed toward the gate. I was too far down the hill to discern the nature of what was going on, but I was betting it was the people from Weimar touring the camp after being marched out from the city. It turned out to be a good guess. An interpreter met them at the gate, marched them around, and, according to the word I heard later, carefully explained in great detail what had been going on in the camp. In fact all the interpreter would have needed would have been a few words and a pointed finger. The evidence was all there; the massive pile of bodies still stacked, just as they were when we first found them; the doors in the crematorium now all open, and more of the trays pulled out with their contents visible. (I expected only the trays with the most graphic displays were pulled, and my informants let me know I had guessed correctly.) The German people were seeing what had been going on in that place all of those years. Now we could bury the bodies.

After the tour had been administered, the group headed back out of the gate and back down the road to Weimar. There was a large patrol of our troops marching them, some on either side of the road. As they were moving back to Weimar, not even out of sight of the camp, a number of Germans in the group found something to laugh about. The commander of the American troops heard them and became livid with anger. He turned them around and marched them, then and there, back through the camp again. This time they went through much more slowly. By the time they returned to the camp the bodies in the stacks were already being loaded on to trucks to be carried away to the mass grave. This time, on the march home to Weimar, there was no laughter. The next day we heard that after returning to their town, the mayor of Weimar and his wife both committed suicide.

My tour on the tower passed quickly. Bill was making hand signals to me from his tower, but all I could do was hold both hands out, palms up, and shrug - I knew only slightly more than he. When we were relieved he waited at his tower for me, and we both waited for Tim, and, once again, we were full of questions needing answers. Both Bill and Tim had seen the rag-tag group pass my tower, and I filled them in on what I had figured out, which was not much. Both of them were well aware of my little visitor to the tower, and I explained how he had tried to let me know what was happening. Eventually we got back to the main gate and were able to ask questions of the guys hanging around there who filled in some of our blank spots.

First: The people from Weimar had made two passes through the camp, and we were told why. Second: The ovens were cleaned out, and the bodies were almost all gone, being buried over the top of the hill where the engineers had dug a monstrous trench. Third: The Buchenwald prisoners had found one of their German guards in a nearby village dressed in civilian clothes, and they had him now in a cell in one of the buildings beside the main gate. (We already knew that the bottom floor of the building on either side of the gate held cells for individual prisoners, and the top floor held offices for the people who worked in the prison. From its appearance we assumed the office above the gate belonged to the Commandant.) The Buchenwald prisoners had the German in a cell at the moment and were interrogating him. No one knew how this gang of prisoners had been able to sneak out the hole in the fence to get to the village. (I found out later, when I talked to one of the third platoon guards, the prisoners had come to the tower and asked for permission just to roam about outside of the fence, promising to be back, and promising to stay off the roads, so the guard thought, "What the hell?" and let them through.)

We walked through the gate to the door that opened to the cell area. It was crowded and the onlookers parted to let the three of us through, and we went to the door of the cell. The German was standing at attention in the middle of the room and was being peppered with questions that we did not understand. The answers were all monosyllabic. Tears were coming down his cheeks. One of the Buchenwald prisoners seemed to be in charge, but a group of them were participating in the interrogation. The one who appeared to be in charge also appeared to be one calm individual. The three of us watched, but we couldn't understand what was being said, so we turned and left. The crowd parted again to let us through. A most welcome sight to my eyes was the absence of the stack of bodies as I came through the door from the cell area.

We went up to the barracks where some of our guys had gathered around the front steps. Sergeant Blowers joined us just a moment later, and he had some news. The first bit of news we sort of expected: we, the whole bunch of us, were infested with some sort of a bug. A crew would be coming over from the hospital the first thing in the morning to dust us and our equipment, everything we owned, and the building. Second: As soon as the fumigation was finished, we were to pack everything up and be ready to move sometime before noon tomorrow. He mentioned the name of a small town in Germany where we were headed, but I didn't recognize it then, and I don't remember it now. We would meet the rest of the Battalion, stay there very briefly, refit, and shove off again, quickly.

That was enough news to crank me up and get my mind off the immediate surroundings. It gave us all much to talk about. We

wondered mostly what the rest of the Battalion had been doing. (We never really found out.) Once we got back in gear again, things would happen that would be nearer normal, and out minds would clear.

It was, once again, time to eat something, and it would be one of our last chances to eat at a true mess hall. A bunch of us shoved off for the mess tent, and we took our time over a fine warm meal. (You must understand the "fineness" of the meal was relative to what we had become used to over the past months; I would have no one think for a second that we were now eating "high off the hog".) We lally gagged there at the table, drinking coffee, talking about the near past, the near future, and there was plenty to talk about. It seemed to me the less people know about something, the more they talk about it. Everybody was speculating, and no one really knew anything. Even what Sergeant blowers knew was sketchy. During our stay at Buchenwald, we had seen the three platoon sergeants often, but the First Sergeant, and the company officers only occasionally. I think the three of the officers settled themselves over near the hospital, but I am not sure of that either. It really doesn't matter, as the three sergeants could handle anything that came up.

We eventually rose and wandered back to the barracks. A half dozen or more of us sat on the front steps and enjoyed the early evening as the sun was getting ready to set. I remember that I had found a pretty good cigar in the PX ration box, and I was enjoying the cigar. The talk shifted around to the German guard the prisoners had found. There were a couple of people who hadn't heard the story yet, so Bill, Tim and I became the authorities for a moment, telling the story as we knew it. The others listened, and they wanted to see, so we led them back to the prison cell. (Realize we still had our rifles. We were trained to go nowhere without them, ever.)

The bunch of us walked over to the gate, through it, and toward the door to the cells. The crowd of people were still there and seemed to have grown, but it parted to let us through. Inside the cell the Buchenwald prisoners, and their prisoner presented a riveting scene: The hands of the German were untied, and, in them, he held a stout piece of rope. He was being given instructions, and, as we watched, it wasn't long before I, and the people who had come with me, realized he was being told how to tie a noose in the rope. The German guard was corrected three or four times, and had to undo some of his work to re-do it correctly. When he was finished he had a very proper hangman's noose, thirteen turns of the rope and all. A table was brought to the center of the room and placed under a very strong looking electrical fixture. The guard was assisted on to the table and instructed to fix the rope to the light fixture. Finishing that he was told to put all of his weight on the rope and lift his feet. The fixture held. (One had to wonder why the Germans had made the fixture so strong in the first place.) The guard was

told to place the noose over his head, around his neck, and to draw the noose fairly snug. Then he was told to place his hands behind his back and his wrists were tied together. The table was moved until he barely stood on its edge. He couldn't see that - his eyes were unhooded and open, but the noose kept him from looking down. He was talked to some more and then he jumped. He was caught before all of his weight was on the rope, and they set him back on the table. The next time he stepped gently off the end, and the table was quickly slid away from him and out of his reach, and he dangled there. He slowly strangled. His face went through a variety of colors before he hung still. My stomach did not want to hold food any longer. I turned and walked away, the rest of our guys following me. The Buchenwald prisoners stayed on to view their handiwork.

I walked through the crowd and out the door, through the gate, and on up to the barracks, and I didn't say a word. The others with me didn't speak either. Here we were - five or six of us - fully armed with semi-automatic rifles, and we did not make the Buchenwald prisoners stop. We let them continue. In one way, we sanctioned the event. It was murder; there can be no doubt of that. The Buchenwald prisoners never touched the rope after it was placed in the German's hands unfashioned. They did not tie the noose, nor did they fix it to the ceiling. They did not place the rope around the man's neck. They did not pull the table out from under him. In one sense, I had not committed murder; rather, the German had committed suicide. A sophist could rationalize that one I suspect. That was not what was bothering me, however. I had the ability and the means to stop the whole thing, and I did not. Neither did my companions. Ever since that day I have been convincing myself that I understood why the Buchenwald prisoners did what they did. I had witnessed their agonies. I had wondered how human beings could treat other human beings as the prisoners at Buchenwald had been treated. I felt I knew why the prisoners of Buchenwald did what they did - so I did not stop them. I have become some kind of a sophist for myself now. I could have stopped the whole action, and I did not. I have had that under my hat for the past forty six years. Now I have written it. I have acknowledged it. Maybe it will go away. There are so many things from that week I wish would go away, things I wish could be scrubbed from my memory. When we returned to the barracks we did not tell anyone what we had witnessed. I didn't. I don't think the others did either.

I was not about to sleep, however. I flopped on my bunk without a thought of my tiny bunk mates, the bugs - I merely lay there. My eyes were closed, but my mind wasn't. I tried to think of other things, but it was impossible. I reviewed in my mind the multiple things the Buchenwald prisoners had gone through, the length of time they had been living through them, and I didn't have to rationalize their actions. Hell, I knew why they were doing what they did. That train of thought took me further and further from my

own guilt, and, in a little while, I was absolved. At least, as absolved as I was ever going to be. Absolved enough to be a little more comfortable with myself. That was enough for then.

I remained like that until Sergeant Blowers came by to break us out for our last tour of guard duty in the tower. I went into the latrine, stripped and showered, and even giggled a little bit as I said hello to my close friends crawling around on me. I would say good-by to them tomorrow.

The bunch of us walked around to our towers and we, some of us, walked very quietly. Others were full of talk about tomorrow. The electricity had been restored in all of the towers, but I didn't bother with it as I entered mine - I knew my way around. Upstairs, I relieved the guy from the third platoon. I put my rifle over in the corner, threw the rifle belt under the table, crawled on the table, lit a cigar, and my thoughts continued.

I thought of my German heritage, my Grandfather Hugo who had come from to the United States from Germany while he was still a teen ager, my mother's grandparents who had come over from Germany long before that, of my mother growing up early in this century in a small town in Minnesota, where there were two catholic churches: one for the Germans, the other for the Irish located only about a block apart from each other, each having its own grade school. My mother had attended the German school, and the only language spoken through the fourth grade had been German. When I was very young she had taught me how to count in German, and how to sing the German alphabet. She also taught me a very few words in German, everyday kinds of words which I still remembered. Three quarters of me was from German background, solid German stock. Pictures of the formidable Hugo, and of the gentle looking John Heinen had always been around me as I was growing up.

I wondered: Suppose my ancestors had not come to the United States; suppose they had stayed in Germany, and, through some fluke, the two people who had become my mother and father had met, and I had been born a German citizen. What would I be like? Would I be like the people who had instituted and guarded a place like Buchenwald? Could I have been that? Would I have been in the German army? The answer to the last question is obvious - certainly I would have been in the German army. But what kind of work would I have done? I hoped that I would not have been like most of the Germans I had seen. I could have accepted a likeness to some members of the German army whom we had fought, but there were many I would have been uncomfortable with. Much of what I had seen ran counter to everything my mother had brought me up believing. This whole situation would have appalled her. I have never ever told her, or my father either, most of these stories about Buchenwald. I did not feel it was necessary. They knew early on that I had been there, and they took "LIFE" magazine. They had been made aware, like most

people in the united States, of what had gone on.

During these past forty six years, these memories have been creeping out of my mind, leaving me with sleepless nights afterwards. Never the whole story at once. Until now. I relive that night sitting on that machine gun bench, smoking a cigar, staring at the darkness. That night I sat in the dark and went through two or three cigars, and several cigarettes. I stared out at the darkness, and there were two reasons for not seeing anything: my eyes couldn't see anything, and my mind wouldn't see anything. My thoughts kept me too busy. They do now also. I am obsecssed with a keyboard, an absolution.

I saw the lights up in the camp, but, at that time of night, nothing distracting was going on. My relief arrived, but I didn't notice him until he was on the way up the stairs, turning the lights on as he came. By the time he reached the top floor I had my belt back on, my rifle in my hands, and was standing by the stair opening. Nothing had happened during my shift, and that was what I reported to him when he reached the top. I walked down, and caught up to Bill on the road. The two of us walked slowly until Tim caught up to us. As we all three walked together our only conversation was of our departure later in the morning.

We got to the barracks, I stripped to my skivvies, and I did sleep. I must have mentally exhausted myself. I slept, a deep sleep, with no dreams I was aware of. Sergeant Blowers awakened us about eight o'clock, and chased us out for breakfast. We had a lot to do. We ate rapidly in the mess tent and returned to the barracks to get on with the morning.

We had to clean our bodies and remove everything we owned from our duffels, spreading things around over the bunks to be ready for the hospital crew, who eventually came over and sprayed everything in sight with some white powder. The whole room was suffused with the stuff. No tiny little bugs could survive the job done on us. We wore masks over our mouths and noses, but we still couldn't wait to get outside into the fresh air. The operation did divert my thoughts from the things I could have been thinking about.

When the hospital crew finished, we dressed in our now white OD's, and headed outside, putting off packing up for just a little while. As we passed the third platoons quarters, we saw the medics in there carrying on. It set us to giggling. We waited out in the fresh air for the hospital crew to finish its job and leave, and then we went back in to pack up. We packed as we always packed when we got the call to "saddle up". There was gear that would be on our backs, and there was gear for the duffel bag and the truck which would be following us.

The second platoon had been relieved from its tour early so the

towers were now empty. It had been deemed unnecessary for the towers to be manned any longer - if ever it had been necessary. I suppose that George dared not take any risk, and he was the one who requested our presence. As we finished preparing for the move, gathering in front of the barracks, trucks with the military government people came by and headed into the camp. They would be settling into our louse free barracks in just a little while. Their primary job would be to sort through the prisoners of Buchenwald, move them farther to the rear of whatever battlefield there was, and then start helping some of them home. Those from eastern Europe would have to wait awhile yet. A new word had started to enter our vocabulary, a word which would become more firmly fixed with time: DP or Displaced Person. These people certainly were displaced. One euphemism or another, I guessed. In any event, circumstances had changed considerably for these prisoners since our arrival.

It wasn't long before another group of trucks and two jeeps pulled up in front of the barracks. The Company Commander took one of the jeeps and the First Sergeant sat beside the driver. The other jeep belonged to the man in charge of the trucks and our two other officers sat in the back of the jeep. (The Ranger Battalion has no trucks of its own and depended on transportation outfits to pick us up and take us where we had to go.) We all got busy throwing duffel bags into the back of the last truck and then piled into the two trucks which had been assigned to each platoon. Sergeant Blowers rode in the cab of our truck with the transportation company driver. The packs we were wearing were thrown onto the bed in the middle of the truck we rode. Our seats were hard slats stretching down each side. We rode in the open with the tarps all rolled up. The weather was fine, cool, but it was a nice day. We kicked off down the road and out of there to join the rest of the Battalion once more.

V

We rode the entire day in those trucks, stopping every couple of hours for a stretch. Our lunch was K-Rations while we were on the move. (There always seemed to be a case of K-Rations around - you just couldn't get rid of the things. They had to be nourishing, because there we were.) We traveled a variety of roads, some of them very good, one of them was a type of road new to us. Today we call them Interstates, the Germans called them Autobahns. We made good time it seemed. My sense was that we were traveling mostly south, perhaps a bit east, but I had no firm idea on our direction as we had no maps in the back of the truck. The Company Commander, no doubt, had a map. Our driver was merely following the lead jeep.

Our timing was great. Toward evening, we pulled into a smallish German town, stopped next to some buildings on its edge, and there were the guys from B Company, who gathered around us while we unloaded. They had heard about us, but we had no idea of there whereabouts, or what they had been doing, which turned out to be not much. Our Company was assigned three houses adjacent to those of B Company. We knocked on the doors and told the occupants to gather whatever they wanted and to leave; they were given ten minutes. We moved into those houses, the guys from B Company peppering us with questions all of the time. We told them everything we could in the brief time we had, but there was no way we could adequately describe the sights and the experience of Buchenwald. The people from B Company got only the highlights. They had seen an issue of "Stars and Stripes" where there were pictures of some of us at work. We had seen no papers at all.

We slept that night, and I slept well. There was no guard duty, no anything, just sleep, and I awoke in the morning feeling good. We were ordered to "saddle up" shortly after we were awakened, and it wasn't long before we were on the road again. The ride this time was much shorter.

We soon arrived at a much larger German town, which, I think, was Bamberg, but I can't swear to that. (It didn't pay to be a PFC, if one wanted to know where one was.) There we joined the rest of the Battalion and put up for the rest of that day and that night. We spent the time getting all of our gear back in shape. That evening a cavalry unit joined us, with their tanks, trucks, and jeeps. As we settled for the night, word came down that we were to shove off at daybreak, and we were going to hit it hard, we were going to roll. George had us working again.

We did take off early the next morning, cross country. We went up and down hills, and through trees. There was no opposition. One of our jeeps rolled over as we were going sideways up a hill - the ground was wet and slippery in this area, and the driver lost it. He and the passengers bailed out safely because they were going so slow. No one was hurt. One of the tanks came around to pull it upright, and we were off again. It slowed us down only a little bit.

Once we ran into a group of German troops, all very old men and very young boys. They had no weapons, merely shovels and other similar tools. They were really not German Army even though they were in uniform. They were in the woods to prepare something to slow us down. They were too late. We looked them over closely and left them there.

Early in the start we had been riding the six-bys, but, later in the day, we switched over to riding the tops of the tanks. Stover and I and two others were riding the top of the same tank, Bill was off on another one, and Tim still another. We, Stover and I, noticed the tankers had C-Ration cases strapped to the fenders of the tank, and we asked if we might have some. We were told to help ourselves. We each selected a can of beans and wieners, opened the tops, and set the cans on top of the radiator screen behind the turret. In just a little while we were eating cans of hot beans and wieners on the top of a moving tank. Our platoon Lieutenant was riding the front of the tank, sitting in a corner between the gun and the turret and saw what we were up to, so he came around to the back to enjoy a meal also. Taking a can out of the case he set it on the radiator and leaned on the back of the turret with his back to the beans. Stover and I, seeing this, immediately started to inch around the turret to the front, one of us on either side, still eating from our can of beans. We were in front of the turret watching and alert when it happened. The heat and the steam and the pressure built up inside the can of the Lieutenant's beans, and the can exploded with hot beans flying in every direction. The back of the Lieutenant's uniform was covered with beans. Somehow we refrained from laughing aloud, and tried to act surprised. The Lieutenant, however, had the good sense to laugh, and we helped him set up the next can.

That evening we arrived at another larger German city, whose name I have never heard. I had no idea at all where we were, but I had the feeling that we had spent most of the day rolling east. We moved through the town, turned to go to the southern edge and pulled up at a large farmstead. That night, while we were on guard, a German infantry patrol came on down the road. They did not know where in their area we were, or that we were at that particular spot. (I don't think George knew either.) We wiped out that patrol in a very brief fire fight, taking no casualties. The patrol simply ceased to exist. They had no time to get any word out.

In the morning we were all up early and we took off south and traveled on back roads, rather than moving cross country. A little after noon we were fired on by some snipers in a very small village and had to stop and clean them out. The first shot fired wounded out First Sergeant, and we lost Sergeant Blowers from our platoon: he was promoted to First Sergeant. As we loaded up after cleaning out the village, we could hear the sound of mortars firing from the other side of the hill in front of us, so we bailed out again and hit the deck in an orchard next to the road. We lost the assistant bazooka man from the second platoon; a mortar round came down on his sack of bazooka rounds. We found his rifle wrapped around an apple tree about fifty feet from where he had been. There wasn't much left of him. (He had come across on the Queen Mary and had volunteered at the same repple-depple with Bill, Tim and I.) A tank and a squad shoved off over the hill and made short work of the mortar.

Once again we loaded up, and took off on the road leading over the hill, the road flattened out and the tank found a new gear in which to move. As we approached the dead end, a tee, of our road we spotted two Germans on a motor cycle moving across our front perpendicular to us. Our BAR man firing from his waist over the top of the turret, took them out with three short bursts - our guy was good. We turned left on that road, passed the spilled motor cycle and the two bodies, and I noticed we were running parallel to a tree line, behind which the land seemed to drop suddenly; We appeared to be moving down a ridge line with the trees protecting us from whatever was in front of us. In less than a mile we came to another road which dropped down the hill rather steeply. Our tanks shifted to a lower

gear and came down the hill under control. It was still quite a ride. At the bottom of the hill we broke through the trees, toward a bridge over a good sized river. The first three tanks in the column crossed the bridge and fanned out on the south side of the river. The rest of us spread out on both sides of the bridge on the north side. Stover and I were pulled off our tank and set up on the high point of the bridge, along with some people with rifles.

This, then, had been our objective. We learned most of the details later, but we had arrived at the Danube River. The large town in front of us was Regensburg. Six bridges spanned the Danube north of Regensburg, and George wanted at least three of them to enable the 71st Division to cross the Danube. Our Company had been assigned the eastern most bridge, a little away from Regensburg, and Stover and I were standing in the middle of the bridge. Our Battalion had been broken up into three columns with two of our companies in each column. We were all out of sight of each other. We later learned the rest of the Battalion had the same sort of luck as we. Right at that moment we held all three of the bridges that George wanted. The Germans, moreover, were making no moves to retake them, and they were also ignoring the three bridges we were not occupying.

We set a point out on the south side of the bridge, and the rest of us spread out on the north side and settled in. Our platoon moved to the west, and, in just a little while, came to a tiny village which had a three-story inn. Stover and I were assigned a window in the third story. There was a thirty caliber machine gun mounted at the window in the next room. We were looking across the Danube and on across a large flood plain. Regensburg proper was about a quarter of a mile away from us, and all of the land between the river and the city was open. We were placed in the third story in the event the Germans decided they wanted their bridge back. It was a great firing position. I had never been around when a bazooka was fired from a closed room, and I was apprehensive, but it didn't seem to bother Stover, so I shut my mouth. We used the inn's kitchen to prepare our evening meal, and were able to add to the C-Rations some very dark rye bread and orange marmalade we found there.

That night a fog settled in as thick as pea soup. We could hear the German armor across the river crank up, but we weren't sure what was happening. The fog was so dense we could not see the ground under our window, much less our side of the river. We spent the night like that, not sure what the Germans had in mind, but knowing they were active. It was not a comfortable night. In the morning the fog lifted early, and there was not a sign of a German. They had been cranking up all night just to move out the other side of town.

In the middle of the morning the order was given to "saddle up" once more. The tanks came down the street and loaded us up and we took off back up the hill we had come down the previous afternoon. At the top of the hill we came across the lead elements of the 71st Division who appeared surprised to see us. It seemed they had no idea we were in front of them. We turned east at the top of the hill, and blew on down the road along the top. The 71st continued on through Regensburg with no problems. We remained on the top of the hill on the north side of the Danube, staying parallel to the 71st Division and on their flank as they turned east on the river's south side. We set a leisurely pace, all riding the tops of the tanks, spending the rest of the day that way, and stopped for the night a long way down the Danube. The next morning we turned east and north and lost sight of the Danube for awhile.

We were never again fired on by German troops. Our last serious action was clearing out that small village north of Regensburg. In effect, the war was over - one could sense it, but not know for certain. George had us racing again. (One thing about working for George was that he kept one busy. He left very little time to think back, because on always had to be thinking ahead.) Buchenwald became a dim memory - well - almost a dim memory. We were back in George's care, and he was not about to allow us to be reflective. It was my conviction that George had us running pell-mell so that we could beat the

Russians out of a whole lot of Geography. (We found out later that George had the 2nd Rangers penetrate deep into Czechoslovakia, almost to Prague, before higher powers made him get them out of there.) I know that he eventually had us a long way into Austria, so far that we, too, had to back out of there aways. George brought us out very slowly so that anyone who wanted to flee before the Russians arrived had time to do it. I had the feeling that George was daring the Russians to make him speed up; he wanted them to do something foolish. At the time, the phrase we used with the Austrian people was, "Russkie commen, Russkie commen."

The war was rapidly closing down. Once again, our Company was separated from the Battalion, and we were assigned to a small town in Western Austria near the larger town of Reid. There we moved into a large, square, white building which was two stories high and completely surrounded by a moat. It had a bridge, which may or may not have been a draw bridge, memory fails me here. The middle of the building was a courtyard, a large courtyard. The building appeared to be a castle of some minor sort. The moat was a stream which had been diverted around all four sides, right up against the foundation. The stream appeared to come in from the northwest, and departed to the southeast. I had, to myself, a big bedroom on the second floor with a heavy four-poster bed, soft mattresses, sheets, a down cover. Much more civilization that I was accustomed to. Bill and Tim were just down the hall in their own rooms. It was glorious.

We were given the job of going into small Austrian villages and accepting their surrender. We collected all of the weapons from the village into one pile, poured gas on them, and burned them. We did away with some beautiful shot guns, really trophy weapons, and it broke my heart to see them go.

We were assigned, three of us at a time, to a truck, and on any given day, we would be given two villages to clean up. It was a cinch: we didn't even need our weapons, which we had, of course, but we always left them in the truck with the driver. When we entered a village, it appeared to be the day for laundry; there were white things hanging from every window. On entering one village we were greeted by a man wearing the prettiest uniform I have ever seen - it made one think of comic opera. Good, Lord, that man was pretty.

On the third day on that job Bill, Tim, and I were all assigned to the same truck. Bill was in the cab with the driver and the maps. Tim and I were in the back of the truck leaning over the cab, and we were all talking and laughing. The weather was beautiful, the scenery was great, the little villages were all picture-book types. We got the morning village out of the way with no problem, and moved on down the road a little bit to the next village assigned to us. As we came down the road to the town square, we saw this dude standing in the middle of the road, with his hand up, signaling us to stop. We did just that. He wore a uniform as least as pretty as the one we had seen the day before, dark green, with white, black, red, and yellow trimming spread around and about in somewhat gaudy taste. His peaked hat was trimmed with pretty things, and the visor had a high gloss. His boots, belt and gloves all were magnificently shined. Hell - he had to be at least a General - he was much more impressive than George. (I think he must have been the town constable, or something like that.) Bill got out of the cab and walked up to him. The man came to attention, saluted Bill, drew his sword, and presented it to Bill handle first: this beautiful soldier was surrendering to three scrubbily dressed PFCs from the United States Army. If the three of us would have had good sense we would have been ashamed of the way we looked. We appeared as tramps compared to that fellow. Not so. Bill, very grandly, accepted the sword, and bowed. The "General" then saluted Tim and me, and we returned the salute. It was all kind of funny.

What astounded Tim and me, standing in the back of the truck, was that the weapons from the village were already stacked in the town square. All of them. The townspeople were gathered around the

square, watching the whole proceedings. Tim and I thought that we might have come to the wrong village, that there had been other of our troops there before us. We called this to Bill's attention, and started to get down off the truck. After studying our maps with the driver and calling in the "General" for consultation it was determined that we were, after all, in the right place. we were still curious as to why the weapons were all piled and waiting for us. This took a little time since the German language the three of us used was a little crude, and the "General" spoke no English at all. With gestures and any other means we could think of, we made our point with the "General", who saluted us once more and beckoned us to follow him. He led us across the square, next to the pile of weapons. As we passed them one of them caught my eye, and I picked it up. It was an old-fashioned beebee gun, loaded; I could hear the pellets rolling around as I tipped it from side to side. I kept that "weapon" with me.

We crossed the square, and the "General" led us to a white square-ish looking building with wide doors in the front which were closed. He knocked, entered, and we followed him. I could not believe what I saw: three men all wearing parts of the Buchenwald uniform. There was no mistaking it. We gaped, and Bill asked, "What are you doing here?" He was answered in English spoken by a man who used the language better than we. He turned to face us, and on his jacket was the yellow Star of David. Looking at Bill he asked, "What do you mean?" All three of us started to speak at the same time, but it was Bill who told him that we had just liberated, and left, Buchenwald a short time ago. He looked at us for a moment, and began asking us a series of questions. We answered as best we could.

The three of them had all been prisoners at Buchenwald. They were, all three, Jews. They had been deemed healthy enough to be marched away from the prison sometime before we got there. He told us of the march. It was the oddest of conversations: the man would talk to us, turn to speak to his friends in a foreign language, and then turn back to us. We would be either asking a question or answering a question, and he kept his friends constantly informed. They would ask something of him, and he, in turn, would ask us. There was constant jabbering amongst the six of us, and the "General" just watched; he understood half of the conversation. The two non-English speaking friends were full of "oooooohs" and "aaaaaahs".

We learned from our new found friend that the march from Buchenwald was a shambles. The Jewish prisoners were constantly trying to escape and were sometimes killed. They were killed, certainly, if they passed out or were collapsed on the road. The number of people in the march grew smaller daily. Eventually the German guards themselves took to deserting. There was no order left at all. Toward the end the Jewish prisoners could leave the march with no danger whenever they wished, and, soon, there were no German guards remaining. Then there were no prisoners, and that was the last of it, the end of the march; these three men in this small Austrian village. My mind was trying to figure the distance to Buchenwald, but I wasn't able to.

Our conversation eventually took a new turn, and the man wanted to know more about us, and we about him. We learned he had been a waiter on a trans-Atlantic steam ship. (His English was such that we accepted these things without question.) He wanted to know where we came from, and Bill told him that he was from eastern Tennessee. The man acknowledged eastern Tennessee, as he knew of it from sailing up the coast past North Carolina. (That told me something of his knowledge of geography.) Tim told him he was from Massachusetts, and the man knew Massachusetts well, having made port in Boston often. I told him I was from Minnesota, and his knowledge of geography reached its limits. I was from the west; therefore, I was a cowboy. In his mind Minnesota was in the west, and things in the west contained cowboys. That was it. There was no alternative. He would not be talked out of it. In a few moments, that was to be my downfall.

The building these three ex-prisoners had taken over was an abandoned village blacksmith shop. The

forge was still there, and a couple of anvils, and the tools of the blacksmith trade were spread around. Over in the far corner was another kind of rig, a strange one. We were escorted over to it, and the man started to explain. Obvious to me, even before he finished his explanation - this was a still. Bill had recognized it long before Tim and I did. These guys were making moonshine. We were shown several bottles of the finished product; the bottles could easily have passed for bottles of water, until one smelled them. The stuff had to be very nearly pure alcohol. We were told that potato peelings were used for the mash. There was a freight car full of potatoes standing on a siding not far away, and these fellows had been appropriating the potatoes and eating them, peeling them thick, and using the peels in the mash. They called the concoction "Kartafilis Schnapps", or something like that. Nothing would do but we properly celebrate the surrender of the village. We all, including the "General", had to have a victory drink from one of the bottles. Since I was a cowboy, I had to have a bigger drink. Bill and Tim fell right in with that. I got nailed into taking more and bigger drinks than the rest of them.

The first sip almost tore the top of my head off - it was some kind of stuff. Many and frequent proposals and toasts were made in that gathering, some in a language I did not understand, and we made healthy inroads into that bottle. For me, each succeeding sip was easier than the previous one. As we waited for the various sips to settle, we heard about the life of the ex-prisoners here in this village. They told us they had been treated fairly by the local people and were allowed the blacksmith shop to themselves. It was comfortable and they were not bothered. Some of the village ladies gave them home baked bread, and others gave them garden produce. They had been accepted in the village, and there was nowhere else to go so long as the NAZIs were still in charge of the country.

We talked, and we drank, and, in a little while, I started to leave the picture. (There is a euphemism for you.) We, eventually - the three men from Buchenwald, the three of us, the truck driver and the "General" - left the blacksmith shop, went over to the weapon pile, poured gasoline on it, and lit it off. (I still had the beebee gun in my hand.) We watched the fire, sipped kartofilis schnapps, and celebrated out victory.

As we loaded back into the truck the men from Buchenwald gave us a large bottle of their specialty, as a memento, for the rest of the men in our company. I but vaguely remember, but Bill and Tim confirmed the fact that on the way back I sat on the cab of the truck shooting Austrians in the butt with the beebee gun. The two of them got me home, up to my room, and into the sack. I departed this world temporarily. Bill and Tim went back downstairs and shared the new bottle with the other guys in the company.

I must have slept the sleep of the dead. I awoke the next morning, my stomach in rebellion against the whole world. My mouth felt as though the whole German army, with cavalry, had marched through it. The backs of my eyes hurt. My head throbbed. Miserable is too tame a word for what I was living through right then. Sergeant Blowers, Bill, Tim, and some of the others were standing near the edge of my bed, gleeful over my discomfiture. Sergeant Blowers held the bottle out to me, "Hair of the dog?" I gagged. They laughed. I rolled over and turned my back to them.

Sergeant Blowers said, "It's over." That didn't register on me. Bill reiterated, "It's true. They surrendered." That started to register on me. I rolled over and propped myself up on my elbow. I was still fully dressed from the day before. Tim and the others had big grins on their faces. Tim said, "It was on the radio this morning. They have surrendered. There ain't no more." In spite of the pain involved, I sat up, "The hell!" They all looked and nodded their heads. Sergeant Blowers told Tim to go downstairs to get a bunch of coffee. We talked and it wasn't long before Tim came back with coffee for all of us. The bunch of them sat around the bed's edge and talked, talked about our future, drinking coffee. Slowly I started to reach a greater degree on normality. We must have spent a half an hour or

more sitting there, sipping coffee and talking. The war was over. At least it was in Europe.

I was nineteen, Bill was eighteen, and Tim was eighteen. Chronologically anyway.